Politicians and the War 1914–1916

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LORD BEAVERBROOK

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POLITICIANS AND THE WAR 1914-1916

Beaverbrook

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by

THE RT. HON. LORD BEAVERBROOK

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TO MARY LAW
AND THE
MEMORY
OF THE
P A S T

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POLITICIANS AND THE WAR 1914-1916

INTRODUCTION

In handing the proof sheets of this book to the publishers, I rest in the hope of being able, in due course, to supplement it with a further volume which will bring the narrative down to the end of 1918—followed by a supplementary volume covering the post-war period in the form of a Political Narrative of our own times.

I would like to call this scrappy and disjointed story, " A Political History," but I am only too well aware that the description would be a misnomer.

I have decided to call it " Politicians and the War," for the object of the book is to deal with political events at home in contradistinction to military affairs abroad. It is designed to emphasise the immense importance of what may be called the civilian aspect of war direction—a thing which war-books tend to neglect.

And this is the only moral of the book—one which I feel it my duty to enforce, because the idea that statesmen have little or nothing to do with

So, in spite of the obvious defects of this method of presentation, I trust that this description of the politics of the war may amuse and instruct the public, and arouse a certain amount of reflection on the uses and abuses of democratic Government in war times.

One last word. I have rigidly cut out of this book all accounts of my own activities, except when a mention of my presence on some particular occasion substantiates the accuracy of a statement.

CHAPTER I

INTERVENTION

I HAVE had it in mind for some time to write a history of British politics during the Great War, and the period of reconstruction. With this object in view I have collected a large quantity of material bearing on home politics from 1914 to 1925, including notes I made at one period or another myself.

On reflection, I am of opinion that some part of this material may be utilised in the form of an outline sketch of the principal events and the outstanding characters of the period. Such a selection cannot, of course, pretend to be final in the view it takes either of events or individuals, but none the less its publication may be of value in fixing public attention while interest is still vivid.

Obviously, such a book is not history in the strict sense. It is merely a contribution to history. Neither is it a day-to-day record of politics. It deals in the high lights which shine on big events of the epoch and on the vital decisions of the personalities who took part in them.

These characters are in most cases interpreted

in the light of personal knowledge. I have ventured to deduce some of their motives from the views I have formed privately, and to indicate the nature of my opinion by the anecdotes I relate of them.

I publish this account in the hope that it will interest, and in the certainty that it will do no harm. In fact, in so far as it interests it may prove of some public advantage. Democracy depends to-day for its successful practice on the judgment and knowledge of every citizen on the problems of government. If that judgment is to be in any way sound, it is of importance that people should have accessible some guide to the conduct of the war by their elected rulers, some picture of the personalities which played a part in it, and still play a part before us. Such an outline of history must either be given promptly or not at all. Nothing is so quick to fade as the immediate memory of public events. Men know less of what happened twenty years ago than of what happened in 1880. A kind of twilight period of boredom and forgetfulness soon supervenes, and by the time the stage of authentic and final history is reached only a few will read the page. But to-day the events of the war are not so long past, and most of us still have a lively memory of those exciting days.

. . . . .

The week immediately preceding the outbreak of war saw the two historic parties locked in a fierce grapple over the Irish question. Attempt after attempt at compromise had broken down

just as the protagonists seemed on the very edge of agreement. I mention this at the outset because the impression caused by the struggle over Home Rule was slow to fade from the minds of many of the politicians on both sides, and, during the early months of the war, exercised an important influence on the relations between the two parties from 1914 to 1916, which is the principal topic of this volume. This "Irish" atmosphere is therefore important, and I shall come back to the subject in the next chapter. But with the first vital threat of war with Germany it ceased to be the dominant factor in the complex of Liberal-Conservative relationship and faded into a side issue.

The problem which leapt into the forefront the moment that war was seen to be inevitable was that of Coalition. Was the War Government to be the Liberal Government then in Downing Street, or were the Conservatives and the Liberals to combine to form a National Coalition War Ministry? Leading men on both sides gave opposing answers to this question, and indeed sometimes changed their minds as circumstances altered. But it is the dominating issue of the period with which I am dealing in this book. The reader who wants a sure guide through the labyrinth of the shifting policies and the conflicting personalities who figure in these pages will do well to take the idea of "Coalition" as a clue to much which would otherwise be mysterious or even incomprehensible.

There were three separate attempts to form such

a Coalition. The first was made by Mr. Churchill in those days of July and August 1914, immediately preceding the ultimatum, when the unity of the Liberal Cabinet seemed imperilled. The attempt failed. The second attempt was made by Mr. Churchill in March 1915, when he persuaded Mr. Asquith to invite Mr. Bonar Law and Lord Lansdowne to the meeting of the War Council which offered to give Constantinople to Russia in the event of victory. This failed too.

The third effort at Coalition was the result of Lord Fisher's resignation from the Admiralty. It was initiated by Bonar Law, welcomed by Lloyd George and carried through successfully against the wishes and interests of Mr. Churchill. I trace the career of the Coalition so formed up to the point when the outbreak of conflicting forces, no longer based on party divisions within it, prove its decay as a governing instrument and point to its early dissolution.

The personalities engaged in these struggles for or against Coalition assume sometimes attitudes tinged with the drama of irony. Mr. Churchill induced Lord Birkenhead to act as mediator with the Tory leader in the first effort to effect Coalition—and the plain proposition was rejected. In the second attempt he induced Mr. Asquith to approach Bonar Law with a concealed offer, which was ignored. The third time he is found fighting Coalition and trusting in Lord Balfour to save him from the Tories. And when Coalition comes, he goes.

Bonar Law, on the other hand, rejects Coalition

twice and on the third occasion he is the architect of the First Coalition Government.

I am not suggesting, of course, that in either case was there the slightest inconsistency. Mr. Churchill was perfectly entitled to hold his view that the introduction of a Tory element into the Cabinet at the outset would strengthen the war spirit in the Government. He was equally justified later on in defending his own control and administration of the Admiralty against Lord Fisher—and this, as it turned out, involved, too, fighting against the Tories and their inclusion in the Ministry.

Bonar Law's position was completely self-consistent in this matter. He had no abstract objection to Coalition. On the contrary, he thought it was the form of Government to which a long and severe war must inevitably bring the nation. But he considered this to be the last step to take and not the first. So long as a Liberal Government had credit for success and good management, and a patriotic Opposition was content not to oppose, all was well. While such a national asset remained unexhausted why draw on another ?

But if the Liberal Government failed, if the party truce showed signs of being broken, why then unity could be maintained and national confidence restored by forming a mixed Ministry. To make a Coalition at the start was like leading the ace of trumps.

When one considers how in the course of the four years of war the capacity and credit of

Ministry after Ministry was exhausted, it is clear that Bonar Law showed a penetration into the future which exceeded that of most of his contemporaries in the fateful summer of 1914, and a commanding wisdom beyond that of his age. So long as the Liberal Ministry could be defended he sustained it from the Opposition benches, but when its hour struck he made a Coalition in a day.

. . . . .

The first crisis in party Government synchronises with the last night of July 1914, when the Conservative leaders were at Lord Wargrave's house, at Wargrave. There, by pre-engagement, I arrived very late to find Bonar Law, Carson and Birkenhead. The composition of the party suggested that it had been summoned to discuss Ulster and Home Rule. But the conference instantly found itself involved in a discussion of the attitude the Opposition should adopt towards the war and the Government. While this was proceeding news reached us of acute dissensions in the Cabinet on the subject of British intervention.

Churchill, in a word, was in communication with Birkenhead, and the first attempt to form a Coalition Government had begun. By this means the views of the Liberal interventionists in the Cabinet—for Churchill believed he had Grey's support in his action and the unspoken assent of the Prime Minister—were put before the leader of the Opposition. The information given Birkenhead was briefly this: Liberal Ministers,

like the Radical section of the country as a whole, were seething with doubt and agitation. While most of the leading Liberals were determined to stand by France, the majority of the Liberal newspapers were dead against war, and this view was finding such strong expression in the Cabinet itself that in the event of intervention some seven or eight resignations might be expected.*

In considering the list of the threatened seceders the formidable name of David Lloyd George immediately flashed through the minds of men. If these resignations took effect, would the Opposition be prepared to come to the rescue of the Government, not merely with parliamentary support, but by forming a Coalition to fill up the vacant offices? Such was the message that Birkenhead conveyed to Bonar Law, and he added that he was informed that the knowledge of a favourable Tory decision in this matter "would affect the Prime Minister's mind." And indeed it is obvious that any Prime Minister faced with the prospect of a secession would be immensely strengthened in his own attitude by such a promise of Opposition support. He would be in a position if he chose to call in Tory support, and even Tory Ministers, to make good his own defections.

Bonar Law would give no encouragement to Birkenhead. He objected to Mr. Churchill as the medium, and commented on the fact that overtures were made through him. This method of indirect communication so common in political circles

*"The Cabinet was overwhelmingly pacific." "The World Crisis, 1911-1914," by Rt. Hon. Winston S. Churchill. Page 199.

never suited Bonar Law, and he would take no action.

The whole method of negotiation by Churchill through Birkenhead savoured too much of an intrigue to suit Bonar Law, who liked the plain, straightforward course. His view was that if any help or support was wanted from the Opposition it ought to be asked for openly and directly by Mr. Asquith himself, and in that case he would go to London. Matters, therefore, advanced no further than the acceptance of the general idea that the Tories should support the Government if it declared for war, and Churchill's effort, though well intentioned, failed.

The truth of the matter was that there were two schools of thought both in the Liberal and Conservative camp. The strong interventionists in the Government would undoubtedly have welcomed an accession of strength in the power of embarking on or waging war from the Conservatives in exchange for a number of Liberal Ministers who were in principle pacifist and not likely to shine in a metier they disliked.

On the other side, many of the Conservatives would have welcomed a direct inclusion of their party in the Ministry. Birkenhead, who was the only strong advocate of Coalition at Wargrave, could have obtained plenty of support for his opinion had he gone forward with it. There were many members of his party who were deeply disappointed at not being able to serve in a War Government. They had to content themselves as it was with very minor positions of service,

F. A. Swaine, New Bond St., London.

These glittering Birds of Paradise.

while they considered that their talents gave them the right to higher places which they could fill to better advantage to the country than the Liberal occupant.

But the movement was checked at the very outset by the clear and unalterable view expressed by Bonar Law that he was opposed to Coalition. As long as the leader was of this opinion, colleagues or followers could really effect nothing in the contrary direction.

On the Saturday morning everybody wished to return to town at once. Bonar Law, however, suggested that it would be better to wait for further news, and that he should go to London later in the day, so that we could all go together. Eventually the whole party motored to town in the afternoon.

Churchill, on our arrival in London, was anxious that Bonar Law should dine with him and Grey that night, presumably with the intention of renewing his efforts to secure an offer of coalition. Bonar Law, however, was too prudent to accept, for the reasons already given. As a matter of fact, no question of a formal offer ever arose, because the situation in the Cabinet did not develop in the direction anticipated by Mr. Churchill, for reasons which will be understood if we consider the balance of forces and the trend of opinion within the Government circle.

The crisis in the Liberal Party was for several days acute. Three main groups of opinion immediately disclosed themselves. There were those who were against intervention at any price, those

who were in favour of intervention, and those who were ready to engage in or abstain from war, according to conditions. On the Friday, 31 July, the day that the Tories gathered at Lord Wargrave's house at Wargrave, the Liberals were still divided. Lord Morley, Mr. John Burns, Sir John Simon, Lord Beauchamp, and Mr. Hobhouse were for an immediate declaration of neutrality without imposing any conditions on Germany.

Allied with this group were Lloyd George and the late Lord Harcourt, who were for peace, but were prepared to leave the door open behind us in case it became necessary to intervene. Beyond these, and shading off to the left of peace and the right of war, was a body of opinion represented by Lord Crewe, Mr. McKenna, and Sir Herbert Samuel, who were not definitely committed to either side. Viscount Grey was solid for intervention, and Churchill, going even beyond him, was pressing for instant mobilisation. The Prime Minister, while in his personal opinion leaning strongly towards Grey and Churchill, was chiefly anxious to maintain unity at all costs. In the ultimate resort he would have stood by Grey, but he hoped to avoid resignations and all ultimate expedients. So strong was the division of opinion in the Liberal Party that it seemed quite impossible to reconcile it on 31 July without resignations from the Government. But a rupture was avoided, and on Saturday it was decided to instruct Viscount Grey to inform M. Cambon, the French Ambassador, that our Navy would not

allow the German Fleet to attack the French Channel ports. Mr. Burns would not even agree to this, and resigned as a protest against any course but unconditional non-intervention, but his resignation was by consent held back, and only announced after further sittings.

On Sunday morning, 2 August, the Cabinet met again to face letters of resignation from Lord Morley and Sir John Simon, but, none the less, the resigning Ministers attended the conclave. This Sunday morning meeting was in reality the decisive one. Lord Crewe, who throughout this crisis, and indeed in the war as a whole, showed remarkable moderation, judgment and patriotism, was at this period specially urgent with his colleagues that what was undoubtedly Liberal majority opinion should not separate itself from the policy of Grey and Churchill, behind which stood the threat not only of the resignation of these Ministers, but of the withdrawal of the Prime Minister, the disruption of the party, and the fall of the Government in the very moment of the most acute crisis which had threatened the British Empire for a hundred years; events themselves would settle the issue.

He was successful. It was finally agreed to postpone the actual decision of peace and war, but to mobilise both the Army and the Fleet at once. This action undoubtedly decided the question, but when the final decision for war was taken only Lord Morley and Mr. Burns resigned,*

*Viscount Grey, writing in praise of Mr. Asquith's handling of the Cabinet at this juncture, says: "Had it not been for Asquith the outbreak of war might have found us with a Cabinet in disorder

Lord Beauchamp, Sir John Simon and Mr. Hobhouse, no doubt for good reasons, preferring to continue their support of the Government. It will be observed at once from this narrative how small in numbers was the interventionist party in the Cabinet; and it had, in addition, ranged against it several minor members of the Ministry who were in the Government but not in the Cabinet, and the great bulk of the Liberal Press.

Even inside the Cabinet itself a majority for non-intervention could certainly have been obtained if a strong man had stepped forward to lead the pacifists. It was a case of quality against quantity of opinion, and the Prime Minister himself, though temperament and judgment ranked him with Grey and Churchill, was handicapped by his position of chairman to the debates and weakened by a desire to maintain Liberal unity at all costs.

In these circumstances practically everything depended on the attitude of Mr. Lloyd George. The pacifists were strong in numbers, but without a leader they were helpless, as indeed the event proved. Would Mr. Lloyd George consent to fill the role of leader?

Letters and diaries will be published in the future which will give a full account of Mr. Lloyd George's actions, of the various motives which swayed him, and of the conflicting emotions which surged in his mind. I will only say this much in anticipation of further evidence.

or dissolution, impotent to take any decision."—cf. "Twenty-Five Years," by Viscount Grey of Fallodon. (Vol. II, page 242).

Those who insist on regarding Mr. Lloyd George as the inveterate Jingo of the war from start to finish are wrong in their facts and mistake their man. The then Chancellor of the Exchequer approached the prospect of intervention with the greatest reluctance, and suffered far-reaching incertitudes of mind.

He consulted with those of his colleagues who had pacifist leanings—or at least they consulted with him. He brought forward a theory, held by the existing French General Staff, that if the Germans violated Belgian neutrality they would pass only through the furthest southern corner, leaving Brussels and the plains of Flanders north of and untouched by their armies.

In the course of these conversations Mr. Lloyd George demonstrated to his friends with a map how small an infraction of neutrality such a military move would imply. He marked on the map with his finger the direction he thought the German march through Belgium would take. "You see," he would say, "it is only a little bit, and the Germans will pay for any damage they do."

At the eleventh hour he came down on the right side. When the Germans invaded Belgium he was influenced in favour of the decision. With this decision there vanished the last hopes of the pacifists and any prospect of that kind of anti-patriotic opposition which supported France and Napoleon against the Ministries of Pitt and his successors. Mr. Lloyd George alone had the genius to play Charles James Fox, and he declined the role.

It appears to me that both Mr. Lloyd George's hesitation and his final decision do him equal credit. He was reluctant to abandon the schemes of social amelioration he had devised and to plunge into war. He did not wish to put the future happiness and prosperity of all the people of the Empire on the hazard of a throw. But when he realised that his country was up against a Power which knew no moral scruples and was dangerous both to the Empire and humanity he took his decision firmly.

Once Mr. Lloyd George was in the war the very power of imagination which had given him pause gradually wrought him up to the fiercest activity in the struggle.

CHAPTER II

CHURCHILL

MR. Churchill was the leader of the War party in the Cabinet. His position at the Admiralty had long inured him to regard Germany much as a man in business regards a rival who is always cutting his prices. He would seem therefore to have been the natural ally of the Tories and their leader.

Yet how, as a matter of fact, was he regarded in the Opposition ranks ?

It can only be answered, he was hated, he was mistrusted, and he was feared. Therefore, though he himself had decided to put all party considerations aside and play the great national role, should war break out, this decision was by no means tantamount to bringing such a truce in old quarrels into effect. It takes two sides to end a party feud.

It was also unfortunate for Churchill that there was not any real sympathy between him and Bonar Law. They were always in some ways at cross purposes with one another, both before and in and after the war. In fact, I shall show in these pages how often Bonar Law upset Churchill's calculations and destroyed his plans. There

seemed a kind of fate about these clashes, for if Bonar Law had no friendship for Churchill he had no enmity either. Churchill, however, showed rancour in relation to Bonar Law. It was the only instance in Churchill's career, as far as I know, in which a complete reconciliation could never be effected.

Bonar Law, on the other hand, never went out of his way to fight Churchill, but he nearly always took an opposite view of what the situation demanded, so that this absence of understanding between the two men had a vital influence on the course of the war. And " misunderstanding " is, I think, the right word. For Churchill never did justice to Bonar Law's intellect and Bonar Law always underratedChurchill's character—by which I mean the power of holding resolutely to those things in politics which one believes to be true.

Both had entered the House of Commons at the same time, but they had never been intimate.

Bonar Law got office before Churchill, but the latter would never regard him as an equal, and always treated him in a patronising way up to the outbreak of war.

For instance, on one occasion Churchill wrote to him as follows :

> " You dance like a will-o'-the-wisp so nimbly from one unstable foothold to another that my plodding paces can scarcely follow you."

In another letter Churchill says—

> " The words which you now tell me you employed, and which purport to be a paraphrase,

if not an actual quotation, are separated by a small degree of inaccuracy and misrepresentation from the inaccuracy and misrepresentation of the condensed report,"

and in another communication he indulges in what might be termed a double positive. He wrote :

"I resist all temptation to say, 'I told you so!'"

The slightly acrimonious tone of these epistles does not mean that the two men met each other as enemies. I remember seeing a typical meeting between them in the hall of the Midland Hotel at Manchester. Churchill had stood at the famous bye-election at North-West Manchester as a Liberal and been defeated. Bonar Law became the prospective Conservative candidate for the same seat at the approaching General Election. Bonar Law was in Manchester prosecuting his campaign, and Churchill had been making a speech somewhere in the Manchester area. Returning from this meeting, he ran into Bonar Law, and went up to him with a great appearance of giving him warm welcome. I thought the geniality on both sides rather forced. Bonar Law said, "Well, Churchill, I suppose I had better speak to you to-night, because I imagine after I've read your speech to-morrow I shan't be on speaking terms." And the jest was not altogether spoken in earnest.

Had both lived and remained in opposite parties, their relations might have become comparable

to those of Gladstone and Disraeli. Had they both been included in the same party all through their careers, the relations between Lord Rosebery and Sir William Harcourt would have afforded a close parallel. In fact, had Bonar Law lived, Churchill would have had no future at all in Conservatism. I never heard the older man use but one kind of language of the younger. "I consider Churchill a most formidable antagonist. None the less, I would rather have him in opposition to me than on my side."

Although this antagonism between the two men necessarily influenced me, I had been dazzled by the brilliant powers of the young Liberal leader. I had dined at his house, had talked with him unreservedly—of course with plenty of display on his part of that kind of wit which contains the promise of coming intimacy.

None the less, I was so far living in the Bonar Law atmosphere of suspicion, that when Birkenhead offered to take me to Churchill's house at the Admiralty on the Saturday night before the war broke out, I went frankly as a critic.

We found Churchill there with a couple of friends. While we were talking a message was received announcing the postponement of the German ultimatum to Russia.

I ignorantly regarded it as an omen of peace and rejoiced in the prospect of escaping a European war. Churchill's opinion was to the effect that this was only a postponement and that it was bad news, not good news.

I argued that a postponement would be desirable

for it might result in composing national differences and avoiding the issue for ever.

"The German staff," Churchill said, "have absolutely promised their Government a swift military decision, first against France and then against Russia. They may be right, or they may be wrong, but if their Government believes them, it will declare war, whoever is against them."

He argued that the German menace had to be faced and fought out some time or another. It would be impossible for British statesmen ever to plan out a peaceful progress for the nation until it had been settled once and for all if Germany was going to control the German Ocean. You were not really avoiding a war—you were simply postponing it.

At this point, since some of us would have it that the crisis was ended, a rubber of bridge was demanded. Churchill took a hand in the game, but I was cut out and looked on.

Suddenly an immense despatch box was brought into the room. Churchill produced his skeleton key from his pocket, opened the box and took out of it a single sheet of paper, which seemed singularly disproportionate to the size of the box, just as the paper seemed too big for the brief message typed on it. On that sheet was written the words, "Germany has declared war against Russia."

He informed his guests. He asked me to take over his partly-played bridge hand, leaving me, I must add, in an extremely unfavourable tactical position. He rang for a servant and, asking for a

lounge coat, stripped his dress coat from his back, saying no further word. We tried hard to concentrate on the bridge game, but it was impossible to make progress. Our thoughts were wandering. A cool observer would, I imagine, have formed a poor impression of our play.

Churchill makes a picture for me at this critical moment when he got the message which meant war.

He left the room quickly, as in duty bound, and forthwith the Navy was mobilised, in defiance of the decisions taken by the Cabinet early on that day. History has recorded the dramatic directions given by the First Lord that night.

For my own part, I simply saw a man who was receiving long-expected news. He was not depressed ; he was not elated ; he was not surprised. He did not put his head between his hands, as many another eminent man might well have done, and exclaim to high heaven that his world was coming to an end. Certainly he exhibited no fear or uneasiness. Neither did he show any signs of joy. He went straight out like a man going to a well-accustomed job.

In fact, he had foreseen everything that was going to happen so far that his temperament was in no way upset by the realisation of his forecast. We have suffered at times from Mr. Churchill's bellicosity. But what profit the nation derived at that crucial moment from the capacity of the First Lord of the Admiralty for grasping and dealing with the war situation !

We waited in Admiralty House long and

anxiously for Churchill to return with further news. But he did not come back, and it was nearly morning when we left for our homes.*

That Sunday morning, 2 August, was full of conferences. Lord Balfour, Lord Lansdowne and Lord Long, and probably one or two others, called at Pembroke Lodge to see Bonar Law, and the general attitude of the party, which was entirely for war, was finally defined in the sense I have already indicated. Bonar Law had drawn up the draft of a letter to the Prime Minister, and this was generally agreed and despatched to Downing Street.

The letter was couched in the following terms :

> Dear Mr. Asquith,—Lord Lansdowne and I feel it our duty to inform you that in our opinion, as well as in that of all the colleagues whom we have been able to consult, it would be fatal to the honour and security of the United Kingdom to hesitate in supporting France and Russia at this present juncture ; and we offer our unhesitating support to the Government in any measures they may consider necessary for that object.
>
> Yours very truly,
> (Sgd.) A. Bonar Law.

This letter was in the first place intended as a record of the Conservative attitude. Further, it was meant to cover the point raised by Churchill that the Tories must strengthen Asquith's hand

*For Mr. Churchill's own description of that evening cf. " The World Crisis, 1911-1914." (Pages 216-217.)

against the pacifists in his own Cabinet. But it did not suggest giving any active assistance.

To this attitude of the official Opposition leaders towards the Government there was one exception. Lord Balfour was an ex-Prime Minister, an ex-leader of the Conservative party, the repository of the Salisbury tradition in foreign policy, and, above all, for many years the moving spirit in the Committee of Imperial Defence of which he was still a member.

These facts gave him both some freedom with his own party and closer touch with the Government. He was consulted by members of the Cabinet before the declaration of war, continued to sit regularly on the Committee of Imperial Defence, and subsequently on the Liberal War Council.

It was at this time necessary, in order to estimate Bonar Law's position in the party, to consider his relationship with Lord Balfour.

It would be hard to analyse Lord Balfour's attitude towards Bonar Law, his successor in the Tory leadership. It was not exactly friendly. Quite definitely it was not hostile. Never was there the slightest hint of an intrigue encouraged in that quarter against the new leader. And yet Lord Balfour was not helpful. The keynote seemed to be a slightly cold but absolute correctitude.

Bonar Law, as was natural to him, rated his predecessor's attainments very high in comparing them with his own. He could not see his own counterbalancing advantages. You could, he

used to say, put a case in which you believed to Lord Balfour and convince him of its truth. And yet he could make a better argument for the side in which he disbelieved than you had made for the cause in which you believed.

Although Lord Balfour was always perfectly frank with Bonar Law, there seemed to be no real point of contact between their temperaments. All the formalities were observed, and yet the relationship remained tepid. In this atmosphere Lord Balfour's co-operation with the Government filled Bonar Law with a certain amount of anxiety. And he was right to be anxious. An ex-Premier and ex-Leader of his own party closely linked with the Liberals might, under certain circumstances, prove a real menace to Tory independence.

Curiously enough, the event proved the fear to be an unreal one. As I show in a later chapter, when Lord Balfour did try to use his influence with the Tories to save Mr. Churchill's place at the Admiralty, he discovered himself quite impotent. With all his detachment Balfour had a sincere affection for Churchill, but failed utterly to save him from the wrath of the Tories.

Lord Balfour's is a curious mind. He does not care for stories about politics or public men. He likes to hear the episodes of the life of action—and action to him seems to mean Finance. He will be thrilled with the tale of a big coup in the market place, and admires the successful promoter. In this respect he rather reminds me of Kipling, who adores the man of action too—only his hero

must be a soldier or a governor. The soldier, if he is a sensible man, is confused by this worship, seeing that he thinks Kipling, the man of letters, far greater than any of his contemporaries. I have seen the same sort of thing happen with Lord Balfour when he heard the tales of the leaders in finance about the time that New York began to dominate the money making markets of the world. The late E. H. Harriman was his hero. This makes it all the more curious that Lord Balfour should not appreciate Bonar Law more. For I have watched them together and realised that Bonar Law was politically the greater figure precisely because he possessed that capacity for action that Lord Balfour lacked.

I have always admitted to a difficulty in forming a proper estimate of Lord Balfour and of the late Joseph Chamberlain. I write them down below the level at which nearly all my contemporaries in politics value them. I cannot be convinced of error. For instance, Mr. Tim Healy, sometime Governor General of the Irish Free State, has always placed these two statesmen in a rank commensurate with any great leader he had known in the course of his long career. And Healy has always had a great influence on the political judgments I have formed. I began to listen to him quite early in my House of Commons career ; but it was just at the time of which I am now speaking that his influence was strengthened greatly by the following episode—

Healy and I left the House of Commons in the evening to walk along the Embankment to the

Savoy and to get a meal. It was at the most critical period of the Mons retreat. As we walked Healy was holding forth about the oppression of Ireland and the iniquities of British rule. I paid scant attention to what he was saying. I had heard it all before. My mind was oppressed by a foreboding of disaster—for I had seen a despatch which had just arrived from G.H.Q. in France.

At last we sat down at a tea-table in the Embankment Gardens, and I said, " I am tired of hearing about the grievances of the Irish—let me tell you something of the perils of the British army." From a somewhat retentive memory I was able to repeat to him that paraphrased despatch of the British Commander-in-Chief almost verbatim. " I mean to retreat to the sea. If the enemy remain in contact, this will be a very difficult operation. I advise you to look to the defences of Havre."

I looked at my companion, and suddenly I saw the tears streaming down Healy's cheeks. In a passionate and vehement flow of words he dedicated himself, before God, to the service of the Allied cause—as though I was not even there as a spectator of his outburst.

I have known Tim Healy—rebel, agitator, enemy of Great Britain—intimately since that hour, and he never violated the vow of service which he made that summer evening.

CHAPTER III

DISSENSIONS

NO sooner were the Liberal Government over their first difficulty in securing a large Government majority for intervention in the war when they were confronted with quite a new difficulty. Strong objections were raised to the despatch of the British Expeditionary Force to France, a proceeding which had for years been considered in British Military and Cabinet circles as represented by the Committee of Imperial Defence as the first step in the possible Continental War.

These objections came from unexpected quarters —both Tory and Liberal. Denial on the part of the authors of these protests would be useless. And after all, why should anyone now consider it an article of faith to deny what they thought or said at that moment ? The event proved that it was right to send the Expeditionary Force out. This does not prove that the counter arguments of fears were not honest.

None the less, the two main sources of these hesitations or objections were somewhat startling. Lord Northcliffe, on the Tory side, came to Mr. Churchill and protested strongly against this

movement of the troops. I would ascribe this action in his case to a confusion of mind on military topics. Certainly his intervention did not influence Churchill, who stood out strongly for the despatch of the Expeditionary Force; all the more strongly perhaps because of Northcliffe's intervention.

Lord Haldane's attitude was far more complex and peculiar. The whole foundation of the modern British Army which he, as War Secretary, and his military advisers on the war had created, was precisely directed to the despatch of this particular force to the North of France, should the occasion arise. It had been asserted officially over and over again, particularly as an argument against conscription, that the Navy, the remaining regular divisions, the Special Reserve and the Territorials were a sufficient safeguard against invasion. The Committee of Imperial Defence had definitely declared in this sense. In all these decisions Lord Haldane was a principal participant. The creation of the Expeditionary Force and its splendid training for foreign war is indeed his greatest claim to be remembered gratefully as a successful executive Minister.

It is clear, therefore, that in theory he was absolutely bound to believe in the despatch of that body. In practice he was found to be voicing all the military doubts and arguments of those who were in favour of retaining the entire British Army at home.

Viscount Grey denies in his book, " Twenty-five Years," that this charge against Lord Haldane,

frequently repeated, has any foundation. He asserts that Lord Haldane "was, from the first, for giving authority at once to send all six divisions to France in the shortest possible time."

It is true that Lord Grey was a colleague of Lord Haldane in the Government, and such evidence bears great weight. Yet I have before me a contemporary letter written by one Conservative leader to another, giving a detailed account of an interview with Lord Haldane at this time. Founding my view on this letter, I feel bound to say that Lord Haldane expressed different opinions from this Conservative writer. In substance he said :

(1) That if the Expeditionary Force were retained it might form the nucleus of a far more formidable force to be despatched at some future date ; (2) that its present accession to the French strength would be trifling ; (3) that its extinction would hamper us in the struggle later on. Such a stronger force might be used subsequently to cut across the German communications behind.

These arguments could hardly be taken seriously. The only formidable reason put forward was that this country would run the risk of invasion by the denudation of troops involved by the despatch of the Expeditionary Force. This last view had been definitely and formally dismissed, as I have said, by the Imperial Defence Committee, of which Lord Haldane was a prominent member.

At the actual crisis Lord Haldane appeared to be absolutely undecided. He used apparently

the arguments of others against despatching the British Expeditionary Force—without definitely pinning himself to them—and yet they were the very arguments to which he himself was apparently bound to make the most conclusive of replies. The case against these arguments had long ago been supplied by himself.

Other influences than Lord Northcliffe or Lord Haldane were at work tending toward the same end. The " Westminster Gazette " showed inside knowledge of the struggle which was going on. It denounced attempts " to drive us into the reckless project of embarking our Expeditionary Force in continental warfare " quite regardless of the fact that the military system organised by the Liberal Government had for years designed it specifically for this " reckless " role. None the less, the " Westminster Gazette," as a Liberal organ, had a perfect right to its own opinion.

The issue was further confused by a third school who were anxious to change the military plans in a different sense, and to land the British Expeditionary Force somewhere on the coast of Belgium with a naval base behind it. From here it would issue out against the right rear of the German turning movement instead of placing itself directly in the path. Mr. McKenna supported this idea, which contained within it the germ of the Antwerp manœuvre.

The predominant view of our strategy in the case of a war with Germany prevailed in the face of these fears, doubts and remonstrances. But the protests caused a considerable delay, and it was

not until some time elapsed that the final decision to despatch the Army was taken. Several days had been wasted.

It is not pleasant to reflect that the issue of the Mons retreat and the Marne, where a few divisions either way would have turned the scale, hung for some days on a hair, and that the timidity of journalistic, military and Ministerial minds nearly exercised a fatal influence on the whole future of their race and of the world. A detached and impartial friend who studied Lord Haldane's mind during these gyrations mournfully reported : " On the whole, I was rather depressed by a certain woolliness of thought and indecision of purpose which seemed to mark his conversation."

The declaration of war by no means put an end to the dissensions in the Liberal Party. In the third week of August the attitude of Turkey was a cause of profound uneasiness, and the question of active operations against her confronted the country. A keen observer has given a picture of how the various Liberal actors struck him at the time. Asquith appeared anxious, with the best of reasons, to avoid a split at any cost. Lloyd George now, for the first time, began to advocate that idea of a Confederation of Balkan States on the side of the Allies, to which, in spite of all his plunges from right to left into every controversy of the time, he remained faithful to the very end.

The rest my informant pictured to me only in a lightning sketch : Haldane, mystic and unprecise ; Simon, the last word in logic ;

Hobhouse, assertive and irrelevant; Runciman, precise in style and instructive in manner—the lesser luminaries of the party bewildered by the disagreement among its heads. As a matter of fact, war with Turkey was delayed for three months.

While these dissensions were rife within the Liberal ranks, an event occurred which destroyed all the good feeling between the leaders of the two parties and gave the Coalition conception a severe setback. This was the resurrection of the old pre-war Irish controversy due to the determination of the Government to complete the Parliamentary progress of the Home Rule Bill and to put it on the Statute Book.

Instantly the ghosts of ancient strifes and hatreds were resurrected in Westminster. Leaders flew to arms and the atmosphere of the House of Commons became charged with party suspicion. Equally in the constituencies the spirit of co-operation between Liberals and Conservatives which had arisen out of recruiting meetings and other common war activities was seriously impaired.

Looking backwards now after the lapse of years, such a violent gust of antagonism may seem hard to justify in the eyes of posterity. A generation which did not participate in the Home Rule struggle of the years 1910-1914 will be unable to understand the intense bitterness of the sentiment it evoked in Liberal and Conservative minds alike—so that even at the outset of the life and death struggle with Germany, any action of the

Government could arouse the old vendetta in full force.

I can perhaps explain the intensity of this feeling as well as any man because I acted as an intermediary in practically all the negotiations for a compromise settlement which took place between the two party leaders, during the months when the United Kingdom seemed to be drifting towards civil war. In all such transactions one felt the complete lack of understanding of, or sympathy for, the standpoint of the opposite side.

At one meeting which took place between Asquith and Bonar Law at my country house at Leatherhead both men had come to it desiring to avoid conflict. Both were men of a high degree of intelligence. Yet so constrained was the atmosphere—so full of irreconcilable antagonism—that no progress could be made at all. The whole negotiation looked like tumbling into ruins.

Bonar Law was harsh and Asquith subsided into silence. Asquith then tried to relieve the tension by walking to the window and expatiating on the beauty of the view as it extended across the valley to the opposite hill. There was nothing like it, he remarked, in the South of England except the view from Hindhead. Unfortunately, this kind of observation never had the slightest effect in rousing Bonar Law's interest. So this move failed.

It was at this moment that I had an inspiration. The "Daily Express" had just sent a special representative to Belfast to report on the threatened Ulster rising. I was even then on very

intimate terms with the Editor, whom we all know affectionately as "Blum," and I had received a note from him describing the fate of this correspondent. He had been suddenly recalled, on account of a misunderstanding, from a land of Covenanters singing eternally "Oh, God, our help in ages past," and was kept waiting for an interview outside Blum's door for the whole afternoon while others passed in and out. At last he could stand the punishment no longer. He sent in a note by a messenger—

> "Oh, God, our help in ages past,
> Our hope for years to come,
> Chuck out the dirty beasts within
> And let me see my Blum."

When I told the story to the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition, humour came to the rescue and a contact of personality was instantly established.

I tell this trifling story because it illuminates the real basis of contact between public men. The leaders of parties live their lives among supporters, friends and subordinates who share their views and intensify their natural bias. When they meet their opponents it is as open foes in debate. In the course of time they lose their sense of perspective and become harsh and unbending in their attitude towards the viewpoint of the other side. This is especially the case with serious and honest men, and the only method of relieving the tension between them when they meet personally is to

introduce some touch of humour or interest which makes them feel that the stage enemy may after all be human.

My own experience is that negotiations proceed better and national interests are more readily served when the negotiators on both sides are not too serious.

When, therefore, on 15 September, the Prime Minister announced his decision to carry the Home Rule Bill through its final stage, he was instantly accused by Bonar Law of an act of bad faith, and the accusation was couched in no measured terms. I will not try to estimate the rights and wrongs of the matter, or to repeat the arguments of the contestants. The issue is dead, and it does not possess a spark of life or interest to the reader of to-day.

My own opinion at the time was that it did not matter a rap whether Bills were put on the Statute-book or not. It was merely to fill in a post-dated cheque which had little prospect of being honoured. It was clear that much water had to flow under many bridges and rivers of blood over the fields of Europe before the question could be raised again, and by then who could tell what the situation would be ?

One thing alone was certain—it would be different. Bills on the Statute-book would be only sand castles against the sweeping tide of change. From this standpoint I thought Bonar Law had lost his sense of proportion in making so much of the incident in the middle of such military events as were occurring in France. He thought differently,

and was quite angry with me for maintaining the opposite view.

The real explanation seems to have been that some men acquired the war mentality rather earlier than other members of the political fraternity, for Bonar Law's attitude was certainly not exceptional. It was shared, for instance, by Lord Carson, as the following story shows.

At this period there used to be regular meetings of the members of the Opposition Shadow Cabinet at Bonar Law's room in the House of Commons at which policy was discussed. But the chief attraction of these meetings was the reception and reading out of the secret cables from the front which the Government thus transmitted to the Opposition.

These telegrams were not sent in exactly in the same words in which they were received, but were first paraphrased in the War Office. I remember that this fact gave some Conservatives considerable offence—as suggesting either that they were not to be trusted, or that the Government were cooking the news. Of course, the real explanation was the danger of the cipher leaking out owing to one of these telegrams going astray.

It was at a period when Lord French was sending back a series of messages which were a source of alarm to the heads of the Government and of the Opposition. Whenever one of these documents, with Mr. Asquith's mark on it, reached Bonar Law, there was perturbation in the Shadow Cabinet. On one occasion Bonar Law's secretary brought in such a message marked

in the well-known way to a meeting, and immediately left the room. His anxiety to hear its contents was, however, almost unbearable. He waited outside and waylaid the first person to leave the room, who happened to be Carson. He was struck at once by something ghastly in the Ulster leader's expression.

"For Heaven's sake," he exclaimed in alarm, "tell me what has happened? What is the news?" "The very worst possible, my dear fellow, the very worst." "But what has happened? Is the news very bad?" "Bad"—in a tone of tragic solemnity—"very bad. Asquith has decided to put the Bill on the Statute-book."

I do not tell this story imputing any blame to Carson. The Home Rule struggle had been his life issue, and if he took a little time to adjust his viewpoint to new conditions he was not the only public man by any manner of means who suffered from this defect. Soon he was to take the war very seriously indeed.

But at this time Carson might be regarded as a bulwark against Coalition. He fully shared Bonar Law's belief that Asquith had tricked them both by promising them that there would be no new domestic legislation during the War and then putting the Home Rule Bill through its last stages in direct defiance of his promise.

So it may be said with confidence that the attitude of hostility towards Coalition which had existed in the higher Conservative circles at the outbreak of war had been intensified by this quarrel over the Home Rule Bill.

CHAPTER IV

THE SECOND ATTEMPT AT COALITION

THIS chapter will be concerned with the internal difficulties of the Tory chiefs and with the second attempt made from the Liberal side to attract them into a Coalition Government. As in the previous instance, the protagonist in this Coalition effort was Mr. Churchill, who now occupied a position of very considerable influence in the counsels of the Government. In public prominence, at any rate, the First Lord of the Admiralty outstripped at this time any other Minister, except Lord Kitchener. His personality made a strong appeal to the imagination of the people. A striking speech of his at the Guildhall, consisting of only a few pointed sentences, had made a limited appeal to Conservative sentiment. And in October 1914 he had figured in the fiercely-discussed episode of the Expedition to Antwerp.

I propose to deal with this question only in so far as it had a political complexion. With its military aspect I am, of course, not concerned, though I believe that history will decide that the authors of the expedition had sound grounds for their

action. In the world of politics the Antwerp affair nearly produced a striking change in the Cabinet, and one which might have profoundly modified subsequent developments in the Mediterranean. When Mr. Churchill hurried across the Channel to encourage the Belgian authorities to hold on to Antwerp until relief should arrive, he was so impressed with the urgency and importance of the situation that on 4 October he cabled to the Prime Minister from the beleaguered fortress in the following terms : " If it is thought by H.M. Government that I can be of service here, I am willing to resign my office and undertake command of relieving and defensive forces assigned to Antwerp in conjunction with Belgian Army, provided that I am given necessary military rank and authority, and full powers of a commander of a detached force in the field. I feel it my duty to offer my services, because I am sure this arrangement will afford the best prospects of a victorious result to an enterprise in which I am deeply involved. I should require complete staff proportionate to the force employed, as I have had to use all the officers now here in positions of urgency. I wait your reply. Runciman would do Admiralty well."*

Lord Kitchener received this despatch from the Prime Minister. His comment was written in his own hand on the margin : " I will make him a Lieut.-General if you will give him the Command." But the Government did not accept the

*Mr. Churchill describes this offer of his to resign the Admiralty in " The World Crisis, 1911-14." (Page 351.)

challenge. Lovers of the curious in history may regret that the occasion was lost for producing the spectacle, unprecedented in modern times, of a Cabinet Minister stepping direct from the council chamber to high command in the field.

The autumn and winter of 1914 were, indeed, a stagnant period as far as politics were concerned. The new days had dawned of a "patriotic Opposition."

But though all was calm on the surface, the depths were frequently troubled. The Tory leaders in adopting the policy of silent support had undertaken more than the human nature of their supporters could always, one might almost say ever, bear.

Fresh from a fierce party conflict, these supporters distrusted Ministers profoundly. Several of the members of the Government they knew to be pacifists at heart. The Conservatives were no doubt burningly anxious to help to win the war, and they found their role reduced to one of negative endurance. There was only one thing which would really have satisfied them—the authority for their party to run the war—and since this could not be granted to a minority, many of them were none the less disturbed and discontented because what they demanded was plainly irrational.

Of all these thwarted desires the two Conservative party leaders—Bonar Law and Lord Lansdowne—had to bear the brunt. Some weeks it rained memoranda from members of the House, and the authors were firmly convinced that the

fate of the Empire depended on the acceptance by the Government of their typewritten views.

The writers made the pills, and they expected their leaders to administer them to a harassed and recalcitrant Ministry. The national service members wanted at least a compulsory cadet system. G.H.Q. in France found a kind of spawning pond for its grievances in the Opposition ranks at Westminster.

Every month a suggestion for a debate which must either have been futile or revealed valuable military facts to the world had to be crushed without giving offence.

In these circumstances Bonar Law was fortunate in the temperament of the man on whom he most depended. The great need was to keep one's judgment calm and one's temper in check, and yet not to achieve a sort of cold superiority on some height inaccessible to the rank and file.

In calmness Lord Lansdowne shone. In 1914 he was wise and unruffled, bringing the serenity of a high, unchallenged position, a long experience of government in all parts of the world, to match Bonar Law's sober-minded and middle-class placidity.

Lord Lansdowne was cautious, too cautious, if you like, but he displayed a consistent and absolute refusal to " get the wind up." I like to think of him in this light. The two men set their faces like flint against the fussiness of colleagues and the indignant surgings of the rank and file.

Under these circumstances the discontented Tories—who were really the political ancestors

of the present Die-hards—turned for countenance and leading to the late Lord Long. This was natural enough. He had been their candidate for the leadership as opposed to both Sir Austen Chamberlain and Bonar Law. He was understood to stand for a Toryism more agricultural and crusted than was usually found in the industrial constituency of Conservatism. It was just as well, perhaps, that he was selected as the chief of revolt —for he was conspicuously loyal by nature, and capable of forgiving the triumph of a younger rival.

Long was *par excellence* the country gentleman in politics. He aspired to be no more. In fact, he was a kind of second Lord St. Aldwyn, but without the ability or acidity of that statesman. His strength lay in character, and yet he had no firmness of purpose. This may seem a hard saying, for character in politics is generally regarded as constancy in clinging to a fixed opinion against all odds. Long, on the contrary, often changed his views, and would express two different sets of opinions at the same time because he had not yet fully realised the fact that he had changed. For his mental process was not sufficiently rapid or clear to let him see at every moment exactly where he stood, or allow him to grasp a contradiction. Yet none the less I maintain that the essence and value of the man lay in his character—in the good humour which covered the occasional roughness, in his sincerity of purpose, in the absolute quality of his personal honesty.

As a matter of fact, he tired in the course of time

of the men who stood behind him—those whom nothing could satisfy but a purely Tory Cabinet, for which there was no popular support.

As his knowledge of the real problems of the war increased and the environment of office gripped him, he tended to march from right to left across the field of ideas, leaving his tail to Lord Carson and becoming more and more the protagonist of the doctrine that his Majesty's Government must be carried on. But this is to anticipate.

As Lord Balfour pointed out very wisely and temperately at the outset of 1915, the dilemma of the Opposition was not to be eluded. You must either have silent, even uncritical, support, or you must have Coalition. You could not have loud discussions of military plans, nor give private advices to Ministers when the facts were not before the advisers.

Under these circumstances the second attempt to originate a Coalition Government was made. This movement, like its predecessor of August 1914, was started by Mr. Churchill, who had a curious passion for bringing the Tories, who were fundamentally hostile to him, into the Ministry. How was he to recapture the spirit of co-operation between parties which he believed to have existed at the outbreak of war? His friend Birkenhead was in France and not available any longer as a means of communication.

But the naval bombardment of the outer forts at the Dardanelles had proved a striking success. Constantinople seemed to be almost within our

grasp, and the future of Constantinople had become a topic of serious consideration between the British and the Russian Governments. It was suggested that as a means of strengthening the War Alliance, the British Government should promise that coveted prize to Russia in the event of a successful issue.

Immediately another question arose. Could a single British party which might be out of office when Peace was declared pledge Britain to this course? Must not the Opposition be consulted in order to assure the continuity of British policy over Constantinople?

Mr. Churchill grasped eagerly at this opportunity. He counted Constantinople as being already in his gift. It might be used as a lure to catch Russia first and the Opposition leaders afterwards. He urged the Prime Minister to invite Bonar Law and Lord Lansdowne to a Conference. He imagined that the Tories would say, not without reason, that they could not take responsibility for such a plunge into European commitments unless they had at their disposal, as the Government had, full knowledge of the reasons which dictated the policy. From that attitude it would appear easy to draw them on one step further—namely, to a decision that they should share power if they were to be asked to share responsibility.

The Tory leaders were accordingly summoned to the War Council to discuss the cession of Constantinople to Russia, should it be in the gift of the Allies at the making of peace.

The event turned out very different from the anticipation. Bonar Law had no knowledge at all that he was being invited tacitly to step into a Coalition Government. None the less, with his customary acuteness, he suspected that something lay behind the invitation, and he behaved at the meeting with even more than his habitual caution.

The Prime Minister, on his side, was not in the least forthcoming. He found it in those days almost impossible to treat Tories as equals. The Tory leaders appeared to him to sit silent and hungry at the board. Inwardly they were registering a decision never to accept such an invitation again. For it was absurd to suppose that they would take responsibility for Ministerial policy when only the conclusion, and not the facts on which it was based, were put before them.

On leaving the War Council, Bonar Law and Lord Lansdowne determined that while they would meet the Prime Minister in private and listen to anything he had to tell them, they would never again fall into such a trap as the Conference on Constantinople had seemed to open before them.

Mr. Churchill's efforts, therefore, so far from promoting a working agreement between parties, leading towards a Coalition which would, as he firmly believed, strengthen the instrument for waging war, had in reality a precisely opposite effect.

CHAPTER V

A KITCHENER CRISIS

THE Government no less had its troubles and dissensions, as I have pointed out. There was far more harmony below than at the top. The brotherhood of man and of arms might embrace the rank and file, but not the Cabinet. In the country Liberals and Tory members of Parliament were speaking once more from the same platform at recruiting meetings. They even met socially in a way they had not done in all the years I sat in Parliament before the war. Especially after the Irish troubles had been forgotten Ministerialists and Opposition began to consort with each other again. There had always been, of course, a group which ignored public animosities for the sake of the pleasures of private intercourse, but it had never been a large one.

Now all this was changed. I remember distinctly my surprise in finding myself dining in the House of Commons with a set of Liberal politicians. This dinner was only the beginning of a general breaking-down of barriers to which I owe many of my present-day Liberal friends. But this atmosphere of brotherly love did not extend to Downing Street and Whitehall.

The early months of the year 1915 were marked by serious disturbances inside the Cabinet over the question of the supply of guns and ammunition to the Army in the field.*

The outside view that this question never became vital or prominent until the time of the fall of the purely Liberal Government in the Spring of 1915 and the Press campaign of that period is entirely contrary to fact. In the course of this narrative I shall have to describe three phases of what is known as the Shell controversy.

The first phase, which we have now reached, embraces the controversy beginning in October 1914, and ending with the appointment of the Shell Committee in April 1915.

The second phase is the quarrel between G.H.Q. in France and the War Office at home on this same issue, which began after Neuve Chapelle, in March 1915, and lasted till the fall of the Government on 19 May of that year.

*For the position inside the Government on this question and particularly in its effect on the relations between Mr. Lloyd George and Lord Kitchener, cf. "Twenty-Five Years," by Viscount Grey of Fallodon. (Vol. II., pages 242-243.) "When munitions ran short and he had realised what the needs were and how they would grow, he made the question his own, though it then belonged entirely to the War Office. Kitchener's principle and practice was to leave the work of other people alone, and to tolerate no interference from others with what he regarded as his job. When he found the activity of Lloyd George entering his department he barred the way. The torrent of Lloyd George's activity foamed against the obstruction, and for a time was delayed; but it ended by sweeping before it that part of the War Office that dealt with munitions and depositing it elsewhere. In short, a separate Department of Munitions was formed, and Lloyd George's method was to get things done by searching out the ablest men for his purpose, wherever they could be found, and throwing them into the work."

The third phase may be described as the influence, such as it was, that this source of trouble had on the crisis which produced the first Coalition. For the moment I am only concerned with the first phase.

As early as October 1914 Mr. Asquith was seriously concerned with the ammunition problem. He had not reached the point of realising that in the teeth of all military advice it would be necessary to call in civilians and new firms to make good the supply, but he did consider putting the armament firms under Government control, and he appointed a special committee of the Cabinet, consisting of McKenna, Runciman, Lloyd George, with Lord Kitchener as chairman, to deal with the problem. The results attained proved, however, disappointing, because Lord Kitchener and the War Office were firmly resolved that a civilian body should not interfere in the ammunition question.

On the last day of the year Lloyd George wrote to the Prime Minister complaining about the Shell situation and criticising Kitchener on account of his neglect of the Russian position. The letter appeared to take the form of general complaints and indicates dissatisfaction and irritation with the War Office. It is as follows :

December 31, 1914.

My dear Prime Minister,

I am uneasy about the prospects of the war unless the Government take some decisive measures to grip the situation. I can see no

signs anywhere that our military leaders and guides are considering any plans for extricating us from our present unsatisfactory position. Had I not been a witness of their deplorable lack of prevision I should not have thought it possible that men so responsibly placed could have displayed so little forethought. You remember the guns and ammunition incident. When I raised the question in the Cabinet the War Office had only ordered 600 guns in all. Those were to be delivered before next September. The immense manufacturing resources of the country had not been organised for cannon, rifles, or ammunition, and America was not even explored. As a result of the activities and suggestions of the Cabinet Committee, 4,000 guns are now promised before that date. Ammunition has also been provided for these guns.

. . . . .

No real effort has been made until this week to ascertain the Russian position. Now K. has invited a Russian officer to come over to confer with a view to helping Russia with ammunition. Two months ago I pressed it on the War Office. Had it been done then, we could have helped Russia while Archangel was still open, and saved her from the perils of exhausted caissons.

Sincerely yours,

(Signed) D. Lloyd George.

By the beginning of March 1915 Lloyd George

was continuing his agitation and his campaign had taken on a controversial form. His dissatisfaction with the Shell position had increased.

On 6 March he told his friends that he intended to resign unless a Shell Committee with adequate powers was appointed. Most of March was spent in an attempt to deal with the situation created by this threat. On 18 March Asquith considered appointing Lloyd George Director of War Contracts, or something of that kind, and relieving him of his duties at the Exchequer. This was the first suggestion of a Ministry of Munitions. But nothing was done and the controversy was allowed to drift on.

Towards the end of March Mr. Asquith had summoned Lloyd George, Lord Balfour, Churchill and Montagu to a meeting which he declared would consider the whole question of putting munitions on a proper footing and of creating a committee which should have real powers to deal with the matter. It was significant that Lord Kitchener was not invited to this conclave.

On 28 March matters came to a direct issue in the Government, Kitchener indicating resignation if the committee contemplated were appointed, and Lloyd George adhering to his own threat of retirement if it were not. The end of the month found the Prime Minister still struggling to arrive at a settlement between the civilians, who felt that the military had not grasped the full import of the situation, and the soldiers at home, who regarded the intervention of the civilians with contempt.

One potent voice was, however, raised in favour of the appointment of the Shell Committee. Lord Balfour expressed grave discontent with the failure of the Government to carry into effect the opinion of the meeting which he had attended in the third week of March, and on 8 April the Shell Committee was finally constituted, and announced in the House of Commons on 15 April. It consisted of Lloyd George (as chairman), Lord Balfour, Harold Baker, George Booth, Sir Stanley von Donop and Edwin Montagu.

The last named supplied much of the hard executive work which this committee contributed to the problem set it. Montagu's abilities were extraordinary. He became the rising hope of Liberalism, the visible successor of Lord Rosebery, at almost too early an age for the hope of the morning to last into the afternoon. At twenty he had almost ceased to be young ; at thirty he was middle-aged ; at forty he already represented a maturity of judgment which accompanies real age. Unrivalled in his mental equipment, he seemed to lack the courage to take the responsibility for his own projects, sound as they invariably were, and as a consequence tougher but less able men reaped where he had sown. His early death was an irreparable loss to the State in this dreadful age of mediocrities.

The Committee was appointed, but none the less matters can hardly be said to have proceeded smoothly. Colonel Repington, speaking of the dissensions over the supply of guns at this period, writes : " Lord Kitchener did not comprehend

the importance of artillery in the war, took no effective measures to increase our supplies of it, and concealed the truth of the situation from his colleagues in the Cabinet." I have never seen any refutation of this charge—though it is really quite unsubstantiated. It is founded on an incident which took place when a number of the authorities on the Shell question were together in a room, and one of the clashes Lord Grey has recorded between Lord Kitchener and Mr. Lloyd George took place.

Just before the Shell Committee was appointed Lord Kitchener had been asked by Mr. Churchill for some relative figures between men and gun material.

Kitchener turned to Asquith and said, " Must I answer ? "

Asquith said, " Yes."

Kitchener said, " I will give you the figures next week."

He did so.

In the meantime a practically identical question had been put to Sir Stanley von Donop, who also put in a return. Lloyd George, with von Donop's return before him, immediately challenged Kitchener with the bold accusation that he was being treated to cooked figures. The whole thing was probably due to a misunderstanding which could have been explained quite easily. But on the occasion of Lloyd George's attack feeling between the various supporters of the protagonists to the dispute began to run high.

Then ensued a scene truly remarkable in itself and more remarkable still in the dramatic con-

sequences which might have flowed from it. Kitchener behaved with great dignity. He rose from the table and declared that as he appeared to have lost the confidence of some of his colleagues, who were supposed to be working with him in the supply of ammunition, he would retire. Such an action could, of course, mean nothing less than resignation from the Government. Had he succeeded in carrying out his intention, the whole history of the political direction of the war would have been altered. For so great was his external prestige at that time that his resignation must have brought about the immediate fall of the Government. Under such circumstances all the Liberals must have resigned together, and a Conservative Ministry, though in a minority in the House of Commons, must have taken office.

That this did not happen was due to two facts—that the door of the room opens *inwards*, not *outwards*, and that Mr. Pease* happened to be present. He was the Postmaster-General and an ex-party Whip, and therefore a man of prompt decision in a political crisis. Pease got up and practically raced Lord Kitchener for the door. So near a thing was it that had the door opened outwards, Lord Kitchener would have passed through before Pease could have stopped him. The Postmaster-General acted swiftly, and placing his back against the door, and spreading his arms right across it, he made it impossible for Kitchener to get out—except by resorting to physical vio-

*Now Lord Gainford.

lence. During the interim some realisation of the devastating consequences of what was, after all, largely an outbreak of temper on all sides, came home to everybody. Apologies were made, and the crisis was averted.

The Prime Minister displayed some humour in pouring oil on the troubled waters. The War Office, he explained, kept three sets of figures, one to mislead the public, another to mislead the Cabinet, and the third to mislead itself. But though concord was restored to all outward appearance, Lloyd George for some time declared that it was useless for him to argue with Lord Kitchener again.

The War Secretary undoubtedly had a motive for the extraordinary secrecy he so often displayed. He used to declare facetiously that politicians talked State secrets to their families, and that on the rare occasions when he moved in society he found the women far more conversant with military facts and movements than was pleasing or expedient. It is not necessary to identify further the political and social group to which this jest applies. " My colleagues," said Kitchener, " tell military secrets to their wives, all except ——, who tells them to other people's wives."

The Shell Committee was therefore brought to birth with great pangs and labour in the Government. Yet, on 15 April, Lloyd George was chairman of the new body—and this he mainly owed to the support of Mr. Asquith, with whom he was for the moment in close accord. Indeed, when, at this period, the " Times," the " Morning

Post," and the " Observer " indulged in some severe criticism of the Prime Minister, Lloyd George assured him with tears in his eyes, and no doubt with complete sincerity, that sooner than join any cabal against him, he would prefer (1) to break stones on the road, (2) to dig potatoes in an allotment, (3) to be hanged, drawn and quartered.

And the new Shell Committee was undoubtedly believed by all who took part in it at this time to possess real powers. It has, indeed, since been claimed for it that the adequate supply of shells which appeared in France in the late summer and the autumn of 1915 was the product of its labours, rather than of the Ministry of Munitions, which five weeks later took its place. On the other hand, the chairman complained that the War Office refused it information as to the real needs and demands of the generals in the field.

Mr. Lloyd George was chairman of the committee ; it was his threat of resignation which had been chiefly instrumental in forcing the creation of the body on an unwilling War Office. There is little doubt but that if he had pressed for the necessary information with the same pertinacity he would have succeeded in obtaining it.

Finally, it should be said in fairness both to the Ordnance and to the original Shell Committee that they stated a case to prove that no orders and no exertions on their part could have produced a more adequate delivery of munitions until machinery for making shells had itself been created. They contended that this machinery was not ready until the " Shell Crisis " was over.

CHAPTER VI

"DRINK AND THE DEVIL"

IT would have seemed at this period that the Shell controversy in the Cabinet, described at the end of the last chapter, was bound to come at once to a decided issue. But events took a quite unexpected turn owing to a strange vagary on the part of the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

After the battle royal of March 1915, and a week before the final ratification of the committee's powers, Mr. Lloyd George had become obsessed with a totally different aspect of the same problem —the slow rate in the production of munitions, which he ascribed to drink. His agile mind flew off at a tangent, and all through April he was more concerned with his scheme of State purchase of the liquor trade than with compelling Whitehall to give the Shell Committee full information on the needs of the Army.

His energies became directed rather to seeing that the working man got less beer than to making certain that the soldier got more shells. The abolition of vodka in Russia went to the Chancellor's head, and he determined to carry State purchase and control in England in order to promote war efficiency.

Having not only conceived this startling ambition, but actually fired the cautious moderation of Bonar Law into agreement, it must be said that he went about the business with commendable worldly prudence. He summoned Lord Birkenhead to advise him how the country, or at least the Tory part of it, would regard such a plan.

By the beginning of April 1915 Mr. Lloyd George had divulged his idea to Radical temperance reformers and Tory front-benchers alike, and obtained for it rather a mixed reception. Bonar Law, as has been said, was favourably disposed, but he would not commit either himself or his friends in advance. This was as well, for a rising note of opposition and criticism soon began to make itself heard.

Lord Lansdowne, though using the terms of great moderation, still rather resented action which was in effect a plea of guilty to a charge of national insobriety.

Lord Long also shared the resentment of working men at this wholesale charge. He was sceptical of the practicability of the whole plan, because of its effects on Radical unity. The Radical temperance extremists, such as Whittaker and Leif Jones, would never, in his opinion, agree to a reasonable scheme of compensation. Nor would the brewers of any class support the proposals.

This review of the situation turned out to be correct. Sir Thomas Whittaker gave the plan his blessing, but Mr. Leif Jones was apparently

regarded by Mr. Lloyd George as too righteous for redemption, and was not made the Chancellor's confidant.

The whole essence of any such scheme was, of course, its finance. Was the country justified in embarking, at the height of a great war, on a colossal outlay, and could the detailed application of the purchase system be made with any fairness to the various interests concerned and to the reasonable satisfaction of the trade ?

Sir Austen Chamberlain was by no means prepared to object to the plan *in toto*. He was, in fact, more sympathetic to it than the majority of his colleagues. Without prejudicing the practical issues, he was not willing to oppose the scheme if the Government declared that it was necessary for the successful prosecution of the war. At the same time, he regarded with anxiety the financial liability involved, and doubted the efficiency of State control and management.

Finally, he distrusted the Chancellor of the Exchequer's tendency to dash at big decisions without sufficient thought and preparation. This, indeed, was the crux of the whole difficulty. Mr. Lloyd George was more replete with enthusiasm than detail, and, in fact, about this period Sir Herbert Samuel was discovered proceeding to a meeting with Mr. Lloyd George charged with the somewhat belated task of producing a practical scheme.

Lord Younger and the brewing interest remained, after an interview with the Chancellor, hostile to the general conception, and their

influence was probably decisive in a scale already sufficiently weighted against a somewhat rash and quixotic undertaking.

What is really interesting about this abortive proposal to nationalise the drink trade is the ameliorating effect produced on the relations between the two parties. Much of the bad effect produced by the Home Rule Act controversy was undone when the Liberal Chancellor of the Exchequer entered into consultation with all the important Opposition chiefs. It is true that Lord Birkenhead and Bonar Law were favourable to the plan, and Sir Austen Chamberlain, Lord Long and Lord Younger were not, but this division of opinion really anticipated the conditions which were certain to arise under a Coalition. The great point was that there had been free and intimate consultation between the second man in the Government and the Opposition chiefs on an important national issue. A feeling of friendliness was restored—and though the issue passed, the impression it had left behind did not. The "Drink" problem smoothed the way towards Coalition.

The next step towards nationalizing the Drink traffic was to appoint a committee, which included Lord Balfour, Bonar Law, Mr. Henderson and Sir Austen Chamberlain, to consider the proposal further. This had already begun to sit when, on 12 April 1915, the "Daily Express" burst the outlines of the scheme on the public, and asked an astonished world whether "England

was to be drowned in beer or methylated spirits." The publication of this news led to a crisis. Lord Birkenhead sent me an urgent message, asking me to meet him at the Marlborough Club. He told me there that Lloyd George held me responsible for the publication of the news in the "Daily Express," since he considered that newspaper to be my organ. I was thus "dishing" Lloyd George's plan by publishing it in advance.

I was able to repel the accusation. I had no substantial connection with the "Daily Express" in those days except a small block of shares and my personal friendship with R. D. Blumenfeld, the Editor. It was not until two years later that in order to protect my existing interests I took over financial responsibility. I took no part in policy until 1 January 1919.

But the blight of publicity proved the final ruin of the proposal, and when Mr. Redmond also entered a strong objection, all was over, though Bonar Law was left mourning to Mr. Asquith over its loss as late as the month of June 1915.

Faced with this situation, Mr. Lloyd George, speaking in the House of Commons on 30 April 1915, abandoned his scheme with the same daring rapidity with which he had adopted it. One moment State purchase filled the whole bill—the next it had vanished as though it had never been. One may marvel at, if one can hardly admire, the light-hearted way in which Mr. Lloyd George picked up this vast new plan as one might pick up a sovereign from the pavement,

and then dropped it again as quickly as if the sovereign had turned out to be a hot potato.

There was no State purchase, and the morals of England, in the long run, were left to the tender mercies of Lord D'Abernon and the Liquor Control Board, whose measures met with a considerable degree of success, even if his successors occasionally fall into the error of confusing Carlisle with Paradise.

Of all the wild and visionary schemes which flitted across men's minds during the great disturbance of the war, this, I should imagine, was the most impracticable. Its author buried it with almost indecent promptitude, and the funeral party hastily dispersed to deal with more pressing problems. This was the last big question which arose in home politics before the crisis which led to the formation of the first Coalition. It was not until 19 May, after the Liberal Government had fallen, that Lloyd George turned back again to the Shell problem from which he had allowed his attention to be diverted, and indited a vigorous attack on our past deficiencies in the supply of ammunition. But it will be convenient to postpone the discussion of this memorandum of 19 May until the actual crisis of mid-May has been dealt with.

While all appeared to be quiet on the surface, something was moving in the depths of the waters more potent to affect the ultimate result of the war than German submarines. Lloyd George was undergoing a subtle change of view and character. He had been seen in the past as a

pacifist—the opponent of "swollen naval estimates," the protagonist of social reform, who went into the war reluctantly, almost as though impelled by some force outside himself. The man of peace was now at war. The new environment began to act on that responsive temperament, and nerves hitherto quiescent in that complex nature began to tingle into life. His moves from the Exchequer to Munitions in 1915, and from Munitions to the War Office in 1916, simply mark his march through the years from the pacifist doubter of 1914 to the greatest War Minister England had seen for over a hundred years.

The Queen's Hall speech in September 1915 was the first outward sign that Mr. George the semi-pacifist had ceased to exist. In that splendid oration he, too, like the generation of which he spoke, had to renounce and recant much, and to make a new dedication of spirit "to the great everlasting things that matter for a nation—the great peaks of honour we had forgotten—duty, patriotism, and, clad in glittering white, the great pinnacle of sacrifice pointing like a ragged finger to heaven." Terrible as it would have been to the Prime Minister to have found in Mr. Lloyd George the leader of a peace-at-any-price party in August 1914, his new development was hardly less disquieting.

Hitherto, if Asquith had been the directing brains of Liberalism, Lloyd George had been the strong heart sending the fresh blood of new policies coursing through the party veins. But

how if head and heart ceased to work in unison ?

Throughout the year Lloyd George studied the development of events and listened to the rambling and cryptic discourses of Lord Kitchener. The experience left him profoundly disquieted. By the opening of 1915 he was a discontented colleague within the Cabinet, pointing to weaknesses and demanding remedies. He was no longer the animating soul of the Government as in the good old days of peace—but its terror—the spirit which denied all the facile promptings of optimism. Worse than his discontent was the fact that he let it be known outside. Wise Liberal heads were shaken over this vagary of a second-in-command, sure, if he would only keep quiet, to succeed to the Premiership somewhere about 1930.

Already, as early as January 1915, the idea of mobilising peace industries for the production of munitions of war was beginning to stir in his brain, and in opposition to Kitchener he had little belief in the Russian Army if it was not stiffened and supported by a constant flow of shells, guns, rifles and cartridges. While Lord Fisher was urging his Baltic adventure and Churchill was preaching the Dardanelles crusade, Lloyd George was for Salonika, the Balkans, and an attack on Austria—a scheme from which he never swerved from start to finish.

He was earnestly advocating aggressive action on behalf of Serbia, and a letter was written at the end of January, as follows :

January 29, 1915.

Dear Lord Kitchener,

You will, I am sure, have seen telegram No. 14 in last night's sections from Sofia. It is so obviously the German interest to crush Serbia in order to detach Bulgaria from the Triple Entente and to free a way to Constantinople, that it is risky to doubt the accuracy of the telegram. The French delayed assistance to Antwerp until it was too late. This time the responsibility is ours, and we shall not be held blameless if a catastrophe occurs.

Ever sincerely,
(Signed) D. Lloyd George.

It was natural, therefore, that our handling of King Tino of Greece, the great stumbling block to British Balkan policy, should incur his special wrath: "Tino," he said, "is the Kaiser's chief spy in Europe, and we write him lawyers' letters!" But he secured more unpopularity by the trenchant expression he gave his views than support for the views themselves, and in February was observing gloomily that "while the whole Press is describing the war as an unbroken success, the facts are precisely the contrary." The early spring, then, was marked by this rising note of warning, menace, and appeal from the new strategist.

Yes, singular as the fact is, Lloyd George had a genius for strategy. Whence comes the instinct for war? While Churchill in his young days was slaking his thirst for military glory on the fields

of India, Egypt, and Africa, Lloyd George was defending Nonconformist trespassers on Church property and slowly rising to fame as the hope of the stern, unbending pro-Boers.

Yet both men possess the same aptitude for war. And there was a further resemblance—a defect—in their military mentality. Once they made up their minds they were immovable—no argument, no contention that the facts had changed since the original opinion was formed could move them in the slightest degree. Thus, neither of them was at any time a Westerner, and while Churchill always believed that the War could be won through Gallipoli, Lloyd George was equally constant in his conviction that it could be won in the Balkans.

He wrote on 7 February 1915 to Sir Edward Grey summarising his whole attitude on this issue.* A copy of the letter will be found in an Appendix and should be read carefully by those who are interested in the Eastern or Western schools.

This fixity of idea was all the more curious in Lloyd George's case—because in many respects his mind was so fluid and impressionable.

Somewhere in the recesses of Lloyd George's mind there moved a strange instinct, not always given to field-marshals, but to middle-aged civilians, like Cromwell, for knowing what was happening on the other side of the hill, or, in this case, across the sea and on the other side of Europe. As the compass turns to the north, so Lloyd George's instinct always turned in the

*See Appendix page 229.

direction of the menace. Conversation after conversation attested this uncanny prescience. But in the opening stages of the war his was the fate of Cassandra—to foresee and to be disbelieved on the word of the nearest major-general.

But the man who simply sits down and prophesies correctly—and Lloyd George, too, like everybody else, made plenty of mistakes, notably on Russia and over man-power—is not destined to be the national standard bearer in a supreme crisis. Lloyd George had not only the energy of words, but the energy of action. He was full of offensive and defensive plans to meet the emergencies he foresaw.

Once he had taken up war as his metier he seemed to breathe its true spirit; all other thoughts and schemes were abandoned, and he lived for, thought of, and talked of nothing but the war. Ruthless to inefficiency and muddle-headedness in his conduct, sometimes devious, if you like, in the means employed when indirect methods would serve him in his aim, he yet exhibited in his country's death-grapple a kind of splendid sincerity. And he was thrifty of human life. He would not press failures at the cost of huge butcher's bills. He was against prolonging the agony of the Dardanelles; he protested against the final and futile horrors of Paschendaele in 1917.

When confronted with the statement that German companies were by that date reduced to the strength of 70 men instead of 200, and that G.H.Q. therefore thought success certain, he

brushed it aside as a truth-loving judge might a lawyer's formal plea. Of course, it may be said that in both these decisions he was influenced by his dominant idea of a campaign in the Balkans, but that does not alter the facts.

But what must be our main judgment on the personality itself, which more and more as this story proceeds casts the shadow of its influence over the troubled waters? A combination of enormous physical ability joined to a mentality so voracious of experience and so sensitive to atmosphere as to attain to greatness by the very variety and immensity of its attributes; a physique so constituted that sleep comes at will at any hour of the day, and that illness is only a high temperature—such are the capacites which make Mr. Lloyd George.

His is, no doubt, the practical mind lacking the broad philosophic view which makes Lord Balfour tower above his contemporaries, or the power of lucid and ordered argument in which Churchill shines, and yet, taking it all in all, in the sum of its qualities, its passions, its knowledge, its expression, its understanding of a whole nation, greater than Balfour's or than that of Churchill either.

Perhaps his most valuable asset is the amazing charm of his personality. Men will go in to him in a frame of mind charged with suspicion, believing him capable of any villainy. They will come out saying, "We have been misinformed; whatever that man is, he is no scoundrel or impostor."

In a word, he understands how to deal with the personal factor. He resembled Mr. Asquith in that he was always intensely interested in the personalities of his colleagues in office—but the interest of the two successive Liberal Premiers differed in its quality. Mr. Asquith was interested in the mental attainments of his friends and subordinates, and his appraisement was often touched with a certain intellectual contempt, as of a superior mind detecting weaknesses. On such topics he would be ready to talk freely. Lloyd George, on the other hand, looks at his colleagues on the human and social sides. He would ask not what a man's brains were, but what his habits, his preferences, his private virtues or vices. As a consequence, his distribution of offices sometimes seemed almost haphazard.

Finally, he is a good friend while it lasts, but there are no lasting friendships at the very summit of politics. Once he is estranged, there is none of that lingering afterglow which makes us still cherish memory and hesitate to strike the sometime companion.

Lloyd George goes right-about-face like a flash, and by this means re-establishes his position even more firmly over the fallen body of his quondam ally. On the other hand, reconciliations with him are equally facile ; but death alone can secure his lasting praise. This is well seen in the case of Lord Rhondda, who was his opponent and then his friend, and has been since so canonised by Lloyd George that no praise of him can be too high. It is his military aptitude shown in personal

politics ; no hesitation, no tenderness ; make up your mind swiftly, and hit hard. It would be interesting to inquire how much of the mentality which makes him great in war springs directly from his long training and pre-eminence as a political tactician. Much there is in common between the two arts. Both require prescience and insight into the mind of the enemy ; both a careful calculation of existing resources, adaptability to meet new conditions pushed to a supreme degree, dazzling rapidity of movement, cold caution at one moment and stark courage at the next. Not that Lloyd George is one who makes up his mind over-quickly and then repents.

Until the actual moment of decision he sways visibly between various alternatives and is plainly influenced by the advice given him. Once his decision is taken, all is over, and further talk is so much waste of breath.

Yet when Lloyd George boasts himself as the last word in " political strategy," he does himself at once something more and something less than justice. He has made plenty of mistakes which would have ruined another man. When he has escaped the penalty he has done so by his genius for theatrical management, which always makes him withdraw a piece which has failed before it is actually hissed off the stage.

He knows that the people see high politics much like a film picture ; they will forget that you have fallen down the stairs in the last reel if you are doing something brilliant in the present one. But though he may be a master of this game,

the massive weight of his personality raises him far above the level of the mere political strategist.

He lives for fame; vices he has none, simple tastes many, unless ambition be a vice—in which case "he is the most offending soul alive." For fame is the passion of his soul and the light of his life; it has supported him in his terrible labours, and nerved him against cruel attacks. To be popular in both senses of the term, to be one with and adored by the people, to be at once a patriot, a hero, and a democrat, so that all three attributes mingle in the atmosphere of a single blaze of glory, such has been the desire of a lifetime achieved.

Nor has this career necessarily reached its zenith; there lie beyond it other heights which he has set himself to scale, and the record of his past and the still unabated fires of his late middle-age promise him the fulfilment of his further desires. And, indeed, as long as he is alive he will never cease struggling upwards. Mr. Asquith once described Bonar Law as "mildly ambitious." Strike out the epithet "mildly," and you have Lloyd George. And if he can be contrasted with Bonar Law on the score of ambition, he differed from Asquith no less in the character of his personality. Asquith's intelligence and mentality were sufficiently simple for him to be able to describe himself and his own process of thought with complete accuracy. Lloyd George's are so complex that he never can. No description, therefore, of his mind whether given by himself or by another, can hope to satisfy him; for what

is true of him in one of his Protean shapes must of necessity be false of him in another. Such was the character who, loaded with a legacy of Tory hate, and rapidly adding to the burden of growing unpopularity among his more passive Liberal colleagues, set out to save his country.

How far he succeeded in realising his ideals this narrative will show.

But before I break off from the subject of Mr. Lloyd George and his activities in the Spring of 1915 I will quote at length from a letter written to the Prime Minister, from which I have eliminated nothing except a personal reference to Major-Gen. Sir John Hanbury Williams and General Sir Arthur Paget.

Treasury Chambers,
Whitehall, S. W.
Feb. 18, 1915.

My dear Prime Minister,

The situation revealed by Lord Kitchener's statement at this morning's Cabinet meeting is a grave one, and I strongly urge that the War Council should take it into consideration at once. After seven months' war we do not even now know approximately the position of the Russians. Sir John French told me that he had been assured by the Russian officers who visited him that Russia would have 3,000,000 of men fully equipped in the field next month, and that they could then sweep back the German and Austrian armies opposed to them. The War Office compute the Russian forces now at

1,200,000. If Sir John French's information be correct the Russian reinforcements available in March would come to 1,800,000. Now we learn that the Russians have no rifles to equip their new men with, and that they can only turn out rifles at the rate of 40,000 per month. At that rate they can only bring 500,000 more men into the field by this time next year. The Germans are capturing more than 40,000 Russians with their rifles each month. What is the truth about their equipment? We surely ought to know. Our fate depends upon it.

I ventured in October last to express my doubts as to the Russian equipment, and I suggested then that we should take definite steps to ascertain how they were situated. I thought then it might be possible to arrange a meeting between the three War Ministers—or responsible representatives.

. . . . .

We ought to have a searching and candid survey of the whole military situation, with a view to devising the best means for meeting it—otherwise we shall drift into irretrievable disaster.

There has been a deplorable lack of co-ordination between East and West, and as long as it lasts the Germans will continue winning. Mere optimistic bluff is not going to float us through this hurricane.

Ever sincerely,
(Sd.) D. Lloyd George.

. . . . .

An attack of pneumonia brought me home from France in the early spring, and on my way out again at the end of April I met Churchill. He told me with great indignation that Bonar Law had thought fit to give him a lecture on his conduct of the Admiralty, " rating me like an angry Prime Minister rebuking an unruly subordinate." Churchill seemed utterly unaware that Bonar Law had very good reasons in what was going on inside the Tory party for giving the First Lord a caution. But he took the hint in bad part, oblivious of the shadows of doom now creeping upon the Government and his own administration, and sublimely ignorant that he was the principal object which was casting that shadow.

In May I received a warning that trouble was ahead from a telegraphic message, which reached me at St. Omer, telling me that a crisis in the Admiralty was approaching.

Events were fast moving towards some momentous development.

CHAPTER VII

SHELLS

IT was common knowledge that an acute difference of opinion had arisen between the Higher Command in France and the military authorities at home as to responsibility for recent failures to advance, and that this dispute centred round the supply of ammunition.

The Shell controversy was occupying the minds of Ministers. I have described in a previous chapter the attempt at increasing supplies by means of a Committee presided over by Mr. Lloyd George and appointed in opposition to the views of Lord Kitchener.

Bonar Law's attitude towards the agitation over Shells was this. He thought that the whole method of supplying munitions should be rectified. But this should be done, first of all, by a private inquiry on the part of the Opposition leaders into the Ministerial plans, and not by a vote of censure in the House of Commons, which would cause national scandal and danger. Should private representation fail, then, and only then, ought the Conservative party to resort to public attack. Such representations he pressed

on the Government with vigour. He was strengthened in this view by the fact that negotiations were on foot which ended in Italy joining the Allies within the month. He firmly believed that a Shell debate might damage or imperil the relations with Italy. He intended to impose this view on the free-lances of his party, and was quite sure that he could do so.

I will now relate in greater detail the story of the " Shell Scandal " in the Spring of 1915.

The " Shell Scandal " really began at the battle of Neuve Chapelle, 10 March 1915. No doubt, deceiving himself, and certainly misleading others, Lord French represented that action to the public as a triumphant victory. I was in the battle area at the time, attached to the Canadians, and the plain truth is that it was a horribly costly failure.

This truth began to percolate to England by way of soldiers' letters and officers on leave, and in a few weeks was the common talk of the mess and the canteen at home, whence it began to reach the public as a whole. In the meantime, the second battle of Ypres, lasting from 22 April well into May, and succeeded by the great attack on the Aubers Ridge (variously known as the action of Festubert, Givenchy and Fromelles) which began on 9 May, had clearly revealed the deficiencies in our ammunition supply and the power of the German defensive.

Lord French was, in fact, faced by failure, and by failure which at the beginning he had represented as success. He stood to his defence, and that defence was that he had to break off the

action of Neuve Chapelle just as it was going to succeed, because his gun ammunition had run out.

The answer to any such excuse from a general is that you ought not to enter into an offensive battle unless you have enough ammunition. The commander who miscalculates is seriously to blame.

I well remember a soldier and member of Parliament at General Headquarters—Captain Stanley Wilson, M.P.—describing to me in those critical weeks, with great prescience, exactly what form this policy of the offensive-defensive against the home authorities would assume. "We have failed, we have lost many lives." This was the gist of the G.H.Q. case. "There may be a popular outcry—very well, then, let us concentrate it quickly on the home authorities."

It is quite true that the Army had not enough ammunition, certainly not enough high explosive; it is by no means clear that the military authorities at the front were not as much responsible for this state of affairs as the War Office or the Government. On this point I shall have more to say in discussing Lord Kitchener's whole career during the war.

It was while affairs were shaping in this way that Colonel Repington came to stay with Lord French, not as a correspondent, for no war correspondents were permitted, but as a personal friend. Colonel Repington was a very clever man, and his advice and assistance would be of great value to the Commander-in-Chief in finding the way out of the difficulties in which

the latter's description of Neuve Chapelle as a victory had involved him. The attack on the Aubers Ridge began on 9 May, and it was of the fighting at Richebourg and Fromelles that the "Times" published the statement on Friday, 14 May: "The shortage of high explosive was a fatal bar to our military success."

I have already described in a previous chapter how much anxiety the Shell question was causing in the mind of the Government, even as far back as 1914, and how Lloyd George had threatened to resign over it in March. The weakness in our munition supplies was therefore perfectly well known, both in France and Westminster, for a very considerable period before the crisis of May arose. We have been told by Lord French how Colonel Brinsley-Fitzgerald and Captain Guest came home on a mission from the Commander-in-Chief and interviewed prominent politicians on this very question. But it was not merely that Guest saw Lloyd George and Fitzgerald interviewed Bonar Law. They and other officers and members of Parliament attached to G.H.Q. talked to every member of the Commons who could be got to listen to them—and this kind of conversation had been going on for weeks before anything serious was published in the Press about a lack of high explosive. A few guarded comments had appeared in the newspapers, but that was all.

The first result of this agitation was a somewhat mild and inconclusive debate in the House of Commons on 21 April on the subject of the organisation of the munition supply. Professor

Hewins, Bonar Law and Lloyd George all took part. It centred, however, chiefly round the questions of " Drink " and " Trade Union Rules " —although Bonar Law said one or two sharp things about Ministerial secrecy, and remarked that he was continually being told by supporters that he did not criticise the Government enough. Anyone, however, who tries to treat this debate as any real form of censure connected with a Shell shortage scandal is reading history backwards. All the suggestions put forward by the Opposition were tentative in character and expressed in mild tones.

Another result of this secret agitation from G.H.Q. in France was to stir into activity the Unionist Business Committee, of which Sir Ernest Pollock, now the Master of the Rolls, was chairman, and Sir William Bull secretary. Professor Hewins drew up a form of motion, to be put down in the name of Mr. Sanderson, now Chief Justice of Bengal, calling the attention of the House of Commons to the shortage of ammunition in France.

Bonar Law, maintaining his attitude of " patriotic opposition," objected to the motion. Sir Ernest Pollock saw him, and he then went and talked to the Business Committee. As a consequence, all action in the matter was postponed. Bonar Law, in fact, quelled the movement and would have kept it in subjection easily enough until he had satisfied himself that Ministers were not ready and able to abolish the Shell scandal themselves, and in any case until the

Italian question was settled. This interview took place before 13 May, on which date the House rose.

When, therefore, Colonel Repington published his despatch on Friday, 14 May, his statements were old news to the Opposition members and contained no information for Whitehall or Westminster.

There would not have been any rumpus at all over what was a defence of Lord French rather than an attack on the Government had not one astute mind at least seen in a single phrase in the " Times " despatch potential political dynamite. Mr. Lloyd George grasped at once that if the general public were told with sufficient vehemence that we were failing in France for lack of gun ammunition he would be powerfully aided in enforcing his own munitions policy on the reluctant soldiers. He therefore inspired Lord Northcliffe to take up the question.

That agitation itself began in the mildest manner by his newspapers calling attention to Colonel Repington's statement in the " Times " of Friday 14 May. These articles were published during the few days, almost hours, which marked the fall of the Liberal Government and the formation and announcement of the new Coalition Ministry. They were not very deadly, and at any rate, they were directed against a corpse. It was not until after the formation of the first Coalition Ministry had been formally announced in the House of Commons that the real Northcliffe Shell agitation began.

The Liberal Government fell from a set of causes totally unconnected with Shells. What these causes were will be set forth in the following chapter.

Lord Northcliffe did not bring that Government down—what he did was to make certain of the creation of a Ministry of Munitions with powers adequate to the conceptions of its first head—Mr. Lloyd George.

This was not the first time that Northcliffe had contemplated a drastic intervention in the conduct of the war. We have seen that he had threatened the strongest opposition if the Expeditionary Force left the country, but in practice did nothing when his opinion was disregarded. The Shell Shortage agitation was conducted with great vigour, and undoubtedly had a good deal to do with the improvement in the position in this respect. This campaign was merged into that directed against Lord Kitchener.

Northcliffe undoubtedly believed sincerely that Lord Kitchener's removal from the War Office was a matter of the most pressing national importance. He knew also at the time of launching it that Kitchener was getting unpopular in the Cabinet—but he failed to realise the extent to which the War Secretary had retained his prestige with the man in the street. For this latter reason Northcliffe never carried out his full original intention with regard to the campaign. This, he told me one afternoon at the Ritz Hotel, was to go on attacking Lord Kitchener day in, day out, until he had driven him from office. But he was,

like all public men, too sensitive to an unfavourable atmosphere to push the matter through. After a time he drew back, and the attacks ceased.

Thus, in the period under review in this book, Northcliffe had three disagreements with the Ministry on grave issues of policy, namely—Expeditionary Force, Shells and Kitchener.

On the first one he was silent—the second one he pushed home successfully with the assistance of certain members of the Cabinet. In the third instance he began an assault, but did not charge home.

Northcliffe was a man of great ability and attractive character. He was very agreeable to talk to, though he could not place his arguments in a sequence which led to an inevitable conclusion, but on the contrary, jumped at the conclusion at once and then simply reiterated it. He was hampered during the war by the fact that while he had profound knowledge of newspapers and publicity, he had no realisation whatever of the political temperament. Thus, he had no first-hand experience of the medium through which he was trying to work.

In his early life the politicians would not accept him. To them he was simply a man newly risen from the ranks, who owned newspapers, many of which possessed no political influence. They refused to recognise either his great gifts or his coming power. They tried to treat him as the Minister dealt with the old-time journalist—somebody to be given little tit-bits of news as a present

in return for flattery and Press support. These methods naturally led to an estrangement.

When it was too late for the politicians to alter their attitude the tables had been turned. When they were willing and anxious to consort with Northcliffe he would have none of them. He often told me that he was better off as a journalist because he did not consort with Ministers or ex-Ministers, and that for his own part he never wanted, as a private individual, to have anything to do with them.

This deliberate abstention from one source of knowledge was a great weakness to him when he had perforce to deal with politicians and politics during the war. He did not know political dynamite when he saw it. At least, he did not know where to place it, or where to explode it. It was this fact which led to his failure to bring down Ministries of which he sincerely disapproved. If he had known what dynamite in politics was, he could have overturned the Liberal Ministry of 1914-1915 easily enough. But because he had not this knowledge he had nothing to do with its overthrow. When in turn he became keenly anxious to upset the First Coalition Ministry which followed, he had no idea how to set about it—although the task was not very difficult. So that his contribution to the change of Government in 1916 was an indirect one. He desired it greatly, and he prepared public opinion for the change.

Again in 1918 he could have destroyed the Lloyd George—Conservative combination at the very outset if he had taken the right course. He

disliked the Coalition sincerely enough, but he did not grasp the particular appeal to the constituencies which would have ruined it. His idea was to be a kind of Clemenceau—the wrecker of incompetent Ministries. But he never could achieve this ideal, because he could not lay his mind side by side with the political mind and so pierce through to the human side of the problem. Even when a Minister or leader was quite ready to come to an accommodation with him, he could not grasp the moment for a deal. He would lecture eminent public men as if they were somewhat refractory schoolboys—and this attitude broke the touch between him and them.

On the other hand, he was successful enough in his assaults on the reputations of particular Ministers in the war, and by sheer pertinacity dragged more than one to the ground.

To all broad principles Northcliffe adhered unflinchingly, once he had fully grasped them. He was absolutely dauntless in his belief in victory, and it was really inspiring to talk to him in bad hours. Nor was this a pose as it was in the case of some of the statesmen.

But he was capable of amazing confusion of mind, as in the case of the despatch of the British Expeditionary Force. I can give another instance. At the end of the war he put out an immense manifesto to be published in his own newspapers, and as an advertisement in others—laying down what the conditions of Peace ought to be. I am told that this was prepared for him in the Enemy Propaganda Department which he controlled.

His staff brought it to him and said that it ought to be published under his name. Northcliffe replied: "Well, let's hear it." As the reading of this vital document continued, it became increasingly clear that Northcliffe was not listening with attention. In reply to an enquiry as to whether he approved of the substance, he gave his staff to understand that his mind was fully occupied with distribution and means of attaining publicity. Thus a document of great importance to his reputation was given to the world with the utmost carelessness as to its meaning, but with vast ingenuity in securing that it should be read.

Northcliffe was, as I have said, a potent force, and proved again and again a powerful factor, compelling the Government to recognise public opinion on war issues. But that was not his ideal. He desired to hold high office, and his associates told him they believed he would attain to a War Premiership.

Whatever the political world may think of Northcliffe, one fact can never be disputed. He was the greatest figure who ever strode down Fleet Street. He had created the character, type and temper of every newspaper which he owned—and there have been few changes of importance in Fleet Street since he left. He established his conceptions of journalism, not only by the direct influence which he brought to bear on that part of the Press he controlled, but indirectly by the example which he set to his competitors.

CHAPTER VIII

THE FALL OF THE GOVERNMENT

WHAT was the real cause of the fall of the Liberal Government in the Spring of 1915 ?

To put the truth boldly and bluntly, it had nothing whatever to do with the Shell scandal and was produced solely and entirely by the dissensions at the Admiralty between Mr. Churchill and Lord Fisher, which culminated in Fisher's resignation.

The idea that the shortage of shells was the cause of the Ministerial collapse has become so ingrained in our mentality that men who knew better have thought this was so themselves.

There are several natural reasons for the existence of this delusion.

By a pure coincidence the " Times," owned by Lord Northcliffe, published a dispatch from the Front exposing our weakness in gun ammunition, on Friday, 15 May. That was the actual day of Lord Fisher's resignation. A few mild articles on the lines of the Repington protest appeared over the week-end in the " Daily Mail." But during this week-end, as I shall prove in this chapter, the Liberal Government had fallen dead by agree-

ment between Asquith, Lloyd George and Bonar Law. On the Monday, 17 May, Bonar Law wrote a formal letter announcing the decision of his colleagues to take a part in the Government precisely because of what had happened at the Admiralty. On Wednesday, the 19th, the new Government was announced. None the less the old Government, to the popular mind—which knew nothing of internal causes—appeared to fall to the accompaniment of a series of cautiously-worded statements in the popular Press which merged (*after the Ministry had fallen*) into a real shriek about a Shell scandal.

This thoroughly confused the outside judgment, which soon began to believe that the Government had fallen *because* of these attacks.

But, apart from the public, not even some of the men most intimately concerned with these events knew the truth. I refer especially to the late Lord Northcliffe and Mr. Churchill, who in one degree or another countenanced the delusion that the Shell scandal was either a factor or the deciding factor in the fall of the Government. Northcliffe's reiterated assertion, of course, spread the legend to millions of people until it absolutely swallowed the truth.

I do not question the honesty of the convictions Northcliffe and Churchill respectively entertained on the subject. Neither of them was aware of what was happening in the inner political ring. Lord Northcliffe knew nothing of any change of Government until the night of Tuesday, 18 May—four days after Fisher had resigned, and after

a Coalition had been definitely arranged. Next day, however, Lord Northcliffe's organ did summarise the causes of the collapse, in this order: (1) Resignation of Lord Fisher, (2) Trouble over Shells. But the first cause—in reality the only one—was soon forgotten by Lord Northcliffe.

Churchill was ignorant, too, as to what was going on. He had been kept in the dark by his own colleagues. He was not told of the negotiations with the Conservatives. In fact, he was treated shabbily. So he might be forgiven for misunderstanding the course events actually took, seeing that he knew nothing about the crisis at all until he came down to the House of Commons on the Monday afternoon.

However, writing years after the event, he ascribes the causes of the collapse to (1) Shells, (2) Fisher's resignation—and he reinforces this statement by saying that the leaders of the Opposition had given notice that they intended to demand a debate on Shells. The official Conservatives, as we have seen in the preceding chapter, never at any time contemplated such a course. Therefore Mr. Churchill is quite mistaken, not only in enumerating Shells as the primary cause of his disaster, but in mentioning them as a cause at all. Possibly both Northcliffe and Churchill were subconsciously swayed in the direction of thinking that Shells brought down the Government because both would have liked it to be true.

Northcliffe would naturally believe that he had destroyed a Ministry through his newspapers. It would be as naturally unpleasing for Churchill

to feel that his conduct of the Admiralty had brought down the administration of which he was a leading member—however sure he was that his policy was right.

To anyone who examines impartially the evidence contained in the following narrative it will be abundantly clear that Shells did not produce the fall of the Liberal Ministry, but that the quarrel at the Admiralty did.

I will now resume the sequence in point of time of my narrative of events. I left it at Friday, 14 May—the day on which Colonel Repington's article on the shortage of munition supply at the front had been published. On that day something had occurred at the Admiralty which led directly and instantly to the downfall of the Liberal Government. On that Friday, Admiral Lord Fisher resigned in protest against the action of Mr. Winston Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty, and within five days of his resignation the First Coalition Government was formed.

It was the clash between these two powerful intellects which overthrew the first British War Ministry—and therefore the story of their friendship and disagreement is worth recording.

Lord Fisher's appointment was originally due to a weakness in Mr. Churchill's position at the Admiralty, which came to a head in the October of 1914, when Prince Louis of Battenberg was retired. Mr. Churchill would far rather have kept Prince Louis as First Sea Lord—and, in fact, did keep him, in face of racial popular clamour, long enough to damage himself.

In addition, Mr. Churchill was blamed, largely unjustly, for the loss of the three torpedoed cruisers, for Antwerp, and for the despatch of the untrained Naval Brigade, and the internment of so many of them in Holland.

Finally, he made an ill-advised speech at Liverpool about digging the Germans out of their holes like rats, which had been seized on by his political enemies.

This last episode points, indeed, to the root cause of Churchill's subsequent troubles at the Admiralty—a failure to keep himself in touch with existing political opinion, owing to the immense energy he devoted to his immediate official duties. But of this I shall have more to say later. Anyhow, a cold wind was blowing on him in October 1914, and he has since recognised the fact. He therefore pressed hard for Fisher's appointment as a support to his own position—which was really another mistake.

Churchill co-opted Fisher to relieve the pressure against himself, but he had no intention of letting anyone else rule the roost. Here, then, were two strong men of incompatible tempers both bent on an autocracy. It only required a difference of opinion on policy to produce a clash, and this cause of dissension was not long wanting.

Fisher's master notion in the war was a landing in the Baltic behind the German lines ; the Russians were to supply the troops and the British Navy to land them, perhaps within a hundred miles of Berlin. This idea of a blow at the heart of Germany seems to have originated with the

successful invasion by sea carried out by the Russians against Frederick the Great in the course of the Seven Years War. It was impossible to say that the plan was impracticable, but it required a violent act of faith to believe in it and its consequences, involving immense preparations of quite new types of vessels. These Fisher set about preparing with his customary energy, and Churchill raised no effective objection at the outset. Then came the Dardanelles expedition, and the whole situation changed. There was only a certain amount of men and material to go round, so that the Baltic scheme was always pulling against the Dardanelles adventure, and vice versa.

Here, then, were two men in a single department, each with a rival project—Fisher bent on the Baltic plan, and Churchill firmly believing that the Dardanelles was the better way.

This divergence was in itself quite sufficient to produce a rupture. There was another cause for the Admiral's discontent, not specially directed against Churchill, though touching his interests. The special and privileged position held by Lord Kitchener—a soldier sitting in the Cabinet—was a source of irritation to the distinguished sailor. Why should the Army have a member in the inner ring of the Government while the expert head of the Navy was only an adviser ? And was not Fisher as good a man as Kitchener ?

Fisher could not realise the unique position which Kitchener held in the British Empire, so that in his own lifetime he had become more of a mythical demigod than a mere man. Lord Fisher

was, of course, a great man, but he was nothing more, and therefore constitutional rules were not broken in his favour. None the less, the grievance rankled, and in conversation with his friends he frequently declared that Churchill should go and that he ought to succeed him as First Lord.

Fisher's resignation was therefore not only a trial of strength on definite naval issues with Churchill, it was directed against the Government as a whole and the subordinate position he occupied under it. A new Government was to make him First Lord and right the Navy's wrongs. And this fact perhaps explains the violence of his method of resigning. He did not merely wish to defeat Churchill over the Dardanelles and Baltic issue. He was waving a flag and courting a wholesale crash.

Thus, after a time Fisher became a voluminous correspondent, and his letters of complaint were expelled with the rapidity and force of machine gun bullets and found targets in the breasts of Opposition members of the House of Commons. Indeed, he had written long letters over his signature denouncing the Dardanelles operations root and branch—and this was well before his resignation.

The wounds festered in the breast of a party which, in any case, viewed Churchill by this time with distrust. Fisher was the apostle of Toryism, the Dardanelles expedition was unpopular, and Fisher was known first to be lukewarm, and later actually opposed. Furthermore, the Tory opposition said that while a strong and famous man

was First Sea Lord some check was imposed on Churchill, while an ordinary sailor would be helpless.

But what if Fisher were to go ? The Conservative party would not tolerate a tame Board nominated by Churchill and subservient to his policies. Churchill did not know it, but he was like a man chained to an enemy—so that both must live or die together. If you throw your chained enemy into the sea he pulls you after him.

As has already been mentioned, enough ferment had been worked up on the Opposition side by the end of April 1915 to induce Bonar Law to give Churchill a warning, which was disregarded. In May the long-delayed explosion took place. Lord Fisher privately tendered his resignation to the Prime Minister. There were several conjoint causes for his action, and he received encouragement from devoted and influential persons. On 12 May the " Goliath " had been sunk in the Aegean—another sacrifice to the Dardanelles—while the fate of the " Lusitania " indicated to the First Sea Lord's mind that we were not putting a sufficient proportion of our efforts into the mastery of the northern seas and into suppressing the submarine menace. The actual point of conflict was the diversion of men and material by Churchill to the Dardanelles against the wish of Lord Fisher.

If Lord Fisher had contented himself with a simple resignation in the ordinary form, it is quite certain that he would have succeeded in ousting Mr. Churchill and would have remained at the

Admiralty in his old position. Indeed, he might have become First Lord. Instead of this, on the Saturday he pulled down his blinds with a dramatic gesture and, walking over to the Treasury, caught the Chancellor of the Exchequer just as he was starting for the country. To him he simply announced that he had resigned and that, further, he was not going back to the Admiralty at all. Lloyd George was thunderstruck. The news came to him as an absolute bombshell, for he was utterly unaware that Lord Fisher had the slightest intention of resigning.

The Sea Lord said to Lloyd George that the long-delayed crash had come over the diversion of certain units and material to the Mediterranean, which had taken place, in Lord Fisher's opinion, without due notice having been given him.

Mr. Lloyd George drew Lord Fisher into his room and sent for Mr. Asquith, who came. But in spite of the remonstrances and entreaties of the two men that Fisher should at least remain at his post for the time being, they utterly failed to shake him in his decision not to remain.

Another intermediary was then sent for. Mr. McKenna had been First Lord of the Admiralty when Lord Fisher was a First Sea Lord, locked in a technical strategic and political battle to the death with Lord Charles Beresford. It was the cordial support of McKenna which had then saved Fisher from destruction at the hands of his enemies, and consequently he had considerable influence with the distinguished sailor. All other means failing, and Fisher remaining locked in his

room at the Admiralty and refusing to see anyone from the Government, McKenna was despatched as a private friend to try and get him to see reason. The blinds were indeed down in the First Sea Lord's room, but McKenna caught Fisher's eye peering out at him from behind the cover. After that he would take no denial and was finally let in.

In a long argument that followed McKenna completely failed to convince Fisher that he was pursuing a mistaken course. The First Sea Lord handed his keys over, so to speak, but resolutely declined to sit down again at his desk.

Lord Fisher departed for Scotland and left the Admiralty without a First Sea Lord at the very height of a great war. This action made it absolutely impossible for any Ministry to recall him to office, and thus, though Churchill went and the Government fell, no profit accrued to Lord Fisher.

Mr. Asquith at first decided to support his First Lord, Mr. Churchill, and gave permission for a new Board to be appointed, with Sir Arthur Wilson at the head of it, and this would have to be announced when the House met in the following week. But the Prime Minister had forgotten the Opposition.

It is now necessary, therefore, to examine Lord Fisher's action from the standpoint of the Tory camp.

Just as the Opposition members were aware of the Shell trouble between Lord French and Lord Kitchener, so many of them were intimately informed of the progress of the conflict between

Lord Fisher and Mr. Churchill at the Admiralty. Lord Fisher had seen to that. Lord Wargrave led the Tories who supported the First Sea Lord, and Bonar Law knew quite well how extended and formidable his activities were, and that the resignation of Lord Fisher would be the signal for an outbreak of hostility to the Government which he would be quite unable to control.

On the Shell scandal Bonar Law had his followers well in hand, as has been proved in the last chapter. On the Admiralty crisis he had not. And here in the main he sympathised with his own followers. He believed that a Shell scandal might keep Italy from coming into the war on our side. He thought the news of the dismissal of Churchill from the Admiralty might actually encourage Italy—for he had no belief in Churchill as a responsible administrator.

One thing he knew for certain. If Churchill came down to the Commons on Monday, 17 May, with a new and tame Board of Admiralty in his pocket, the Tory party would revolt instantly. The Truce of God between the Liberal and Conservative parties would come to an abrupt end.

This was precisely the contingency that Bonar Law was most anxious to avoid. He had endured much since August 1914 in order to keep his promise of a silent and patriotic Opposition, but the limit of his resources had now been reached. An acrimonious debate on high questions of naval policy would be an indecent picture in the middle of a great war. And the debate would be

followed by a division, with the Opposition voting against the new Admiralty Board. But the leader of the Opposition decided to face the facts.

Supposing the Government fell, could the Conservative party alone support an Administration ? It was improbable. But to coalesce after defeating the Government would immensely increase all the difficulties in the way of a Coalition. Bonar Law had never been greatly enamoured of the Coalition idea for its own sake, but it seemed to him that matters had come to a point which he had foreseen some months before, when a partially discredited Government could only be rescued by a new infusion of blood. He did not like Coalition, but it seemed the least of possible evils.

Bonar Law would not see Fisher, who sought out a personal interview through an intermediary. He was determined that he would not be drawn into the consideration of the personal quarrel between Fisher and Churchill. He would only deal with public issues. Further, he was annoyed with Fisher for the method chosen for imparting the news of the resignation to various members of the Opposition. The plan selected for informing Bonar Law himself was indeed original.

The leader of the Opposition lived at Pembroke Lodge, in Edwardes Square. There he received by post a singular missive.

It was simply a marked cutting from the " Pall Mall Gazette " in an envelope addressed in Lord Fisher's hand, stating that " Lord Fisher was received in audience of the King and remained there about half an hour." The form of the letter

convinced him that the sender was Lord Fisher himself, and that Fisher wished him to know this fact. Bonar Law came to the conclusion that Lord Fisher had resigned. Other Tory friends of Fisher were also informed of the resignation, and it was clear that soon after the House met on Monday the storm would break.

Bonar Law immediately saw Lord Lansdowne, wrote to Mr. Asquith, and made an appointment to see Lloyd George. The object of the interview was this, and this alone : Bonar Law was going to tell Lloyd George that if Fisher had really resigned, the Tory party would not permit Churchill to turn Fisher out and to remain himself. His first question to Lloyd George was, therefore, whether the resignation was an accomplished fact. Lloyd George said it was.

Bonar Law replied : " Then the situation is impossible." He pointed out to Lloyd George that Fisher was the darling of the Tory party, Churchill had become its bugbear. Was the first to go and the second to stay ? The rank and file of the Opposition would not tolerate it. When the House met again on Monday the new list of the Admiralty Board would have to be read out. Then the tempest would break with uncontrollable violence, and the Opposition would once again begin to oppose. Bonar Law finally told Lloyd George plainly that of his own personal knowledge he was convinced that he could not hold his followers back, even if he wished to.

Lloyd George saw the position in a moment

when faced with the alternative between Coalition and open rupture.

" Of course," he said, " we must have a Coalition, for the alternative is impossible," and, taking Bonar Law by the arm, he led him through the private passage which runs from the back of the Treasury to Nos. 10 and 11 Downing Street, and brought him to Mr. Asquith.

From the moment that the two men exchanged these sentences the Government was dead and the leading articles on Shell shortage in the newspapers of the next few days were only bullets fired into a corpse from which life had already departed.

This is the exact way in which the Liberal Government of 1915 fell.

Bonar Law, after rejecting Coalition twice—once consciously and once unconsciously—had seized on it the third time. A critic might say that he had been driven into this step by the feelings of his own supporters. This is not the case. To begin with, he sympathised on the whole with the views of the Tory back-benchers on the issue at the Admiralty. But in any case, the conditions he had laid down in his own mind and expressed in private in August 1914 had now fulfilled themselves. The Government was falling and discredited. The party truce could no longer be kept. The time for a Coalition, the possibility and necessity of which he had long foreseen, had now arrived, and as his decision had been formed for months, he was able to act on it with his usual sureness and promptitude.

Never, perhaps, has so important a political

decision been carried out so quickly. Mr. Asquith supported the plan for a Coalition at once. Immediately after the conversation with Asquith a meeting of as many of the Tory leaders as could be collected at short notice was held at Lansdowne House. Bonar Law informed his colleagues of Fisher's resignation and of conversations with Lloyd George and Asquith.

The following letter was sent to the Prime Minister:

Lansdowne House,
17 May, 1915.

Dear Mr. Asquith,

Lord Lansdowne and I have learnt with dismay that Lord Fisher has resigned, and we have come to the conclusion that we cannot allow the House to adjourn until this fact has been made known and discussed.

We think the time has come when we ought to have a clear statement from you as to the policy which the Government intends to pursue. In our opinion things cannot go on as they are, and some change in the Constitution of the Government seems to us inevitable if it is to retain a sufficient measure of public confidence to conduct the war to a successful conclusion.

The situation in Italy makes it particularly undesirable to have anything in the nature of a controversial discussion in the House of Commons at present, and if you are prepared to take the necessary steps to secure the object which I have indicated, and if Lord Fisher's

resignation is in the meantime postponed, we shall be ready to keep silence now. Otherwise, I must to-day ask you whether Lord Fisher has resigned, and press for a day to discuss the situation arising out of his resignation.

Yours, etc.,

(Sgd.) A. Bonar Law.

This letter shows with finality that it was the Churchill-Fisher quarrel and not the question of Shells which brought the Liberal War Government to the ground.

When the real Shell agitation began, several days after the fall of the Government, it took a dual form.

As I have stated, Lord Northcliffe launched hs campaign in order to arouse the public. Mr. Lloyd George, too, was busy in Cabinet circles. Behind both manifestations lay a common purpose—to take the supply of munitions right away from Lord Kitchener and the War Office.

On 19 May 1915, the day that the formation of a new Ministry was announced in the House of Commons, Mr. Lloyd George wrote to the Prime Minister to this effect—He must reconsider his position as Chairman of the Shells Committee. Such a Committee functioning through a Department of the War Office had no real executive authority and he would not go on with what had proved an unsatisfactory arrangement. In other words, the Shells Committee must be a department in itself.

This letter is as follows :

May 19, 1915.

My dear Prime Minister,

Certain facts have been brought to my notice on the question of munitions which I have felt bound to call your attention to. I write to you, inasmuch as my appointment as chairman of the Munitions Committee came direct from you.

In order properly to discharge our functions as a committee it was essential that all information as to the character of the explosive most urgently needed and the present supply available should be afforded to us. I am now informed, on what appears to be reliable information:

(1) That in order to attack highly developed trenches, protected by barbed wire entanglements, shrapnel is useless, and high explosive shells indispensable.

(2) That those who are responsible for conducting operations at the front have for months impressed this fact upon the War Office, and asked in the first instance that 25 per cent. of the shells sent to France should be high explosive, and that afterwards this percentage was increased to 50 per cent.

(3) That, notwithstanding these urgent representations, the percentage of high-explosive shell provided for the 18-pounders has never exceeded 8 per cent.; that when the great combined attack to break through the German lines was made by the French and British armies last Sunday week, the French prepared the attack with an overwhelming bombardment of high explosive, which utterly demolished the German

trenches and barbed-wire entanglements, thus enabling the French to penetrate the German lines for four miles without any excessive loss of life. In spite of the fact that the French spent their high explosive munitions lavishly, they have still in reserve hundreds of thousands of shells of the same kind for the purpose of continuing their operations. On the other hand, our armies had less than 45,000 high explosive shells in all; of these about 18,000 were 18-pounders. They therefore had to rely on shrapnel, so that when our troops advanced to the attack the German fortifications were barely pock-marked. The Germans rose in their trenches and mocked at our advancing troops, and then calmly mowed them down in thousands. The Germans themselves have barely lost 200 men.

I am also told that the attack on Saturday last had to be made by night—a risky operation—because of the deficiencies in high-explosive shell, and that after the battle there were not more than 2,000 high-explosive shells left for all our guns.

(4) That a full report on ammunition was sent to the War Office weeks ago from Headquarters in France, and that then later on another report on guns was sent. Neither of these reports on guns has ever been shown to the Munitions Committee, and I gather they have not been seen by you.

If these facts are approximately correct, I hesitate to think what action the public would

insist on if they were known. But it is quite clear that the proceedings of a Munitions Committee from which vital information of this character is withheld must be a farce. I cannot, therefore, continue to preside over them under such conditions. It is now eight months since I ventured to call attention of the Cabinet to the importance of mobilising all our engineering resources for the production of munitions and equipments of war. In October of last year I brought a full report from France showing how the French Ministry for War had coped with the difficulty. The Cabinet at that date decided that the same course should be pursued here, and a Cabinet Committee was set up for that purpose. We met at the War Office, and it was there agreed, with the Secretary of State in the chair, that steps of that kind should be taken in this country. I regret to say, after some inquiry, that action on those lines has not been taken even to this hour except at Leeds.

A Cabinet Committee cannot have executive power ; it can only advise and recommend. It is for the Department to act. They have not done so, and all the horrible loss of life which has occurred in consequence of the lack of high-explosive shell is the result.

Private firms cannot turn out shrapnel because of the complicated character of the shell, but the testimony is unanimous that the high explosive is a simple shell, and that any engineering concern could easily produce it. That has been the experience of France.

(Sd.) D. Lloyd George.

On Friday, 21 May, when the new Government was being formed, the "Daily Mail" began its real "Shell Campaign," making use of the word "scandal" for the first time in flaring headlines. A violent attack on Lord Kitchener and the War Office management of munitions was also launched. The Kitchener attack was instantly abandoned, but the Shell agitation was carried on with immense vigour for ten days and then dropped. The object, which was to force the creation of a Ministry of Munitions and to make an atmosphere which would afford an excellent opportunity to the new Minister, was achieved by that time.

CHAPTER IX

" OFFICES "

THE distribution of offices was the next, and not very agreeable, task of the new Government. It was settled at once in principle that the Conservatives and Liberals should divide the posts equally between them. Churchill was, of course, the principal sufferer in a *debacle* of which he had been the primary occasion. He was very loath to leave his great work and office.

I think I am right in saying that it was on the night of Tuesday 18 May that I dined with Birkenhead, who took me to see Churchill at the Admiralty. Churchill had only been told when he actually came down to the House in the afternoon of the day before to read out his new Board that the Coalition would be formed, that the Ministry would be reconstructed, and that no new Board could be appointed for the present.

It was certainly rather terrible to have this news of defeat in the hour of apparent victory broken to one suddenly behind the Speaker's Chair !

What days that Monday and Tuesday must have been for Churchill ! Has any man ever gone through such a hail of incidents, such rapid alternations of hope and despair, such a succession

G. Crow & Co., Glasgow.

This sombre figure among these glittering
Birds of Paradise.

THE RT. HON. ANDREW BONAR LAW.

of good news and bad news, in the course of two days ? Consider the direction that events took. The First Lord came down to the Commons on that Monday full of confidence. Lord Fisher had been removed from his path—to all appearance without any evil consequence. Henceforward, he would be sole master at the Admiralty. The list of his new Board was in his pocket, and had been approved by the Prime Minister. None of the senior naval officers showed any disposition to refuse promotions and appointments on account of Fisher's mutiny. Assured of Mr. Asquith's support, he did not believe that the Opposition could do anything effective against him, nor did he anticipate any great storm in the Commons—whose members were now waiting for him as an audience attend the rising of the curtain and the entrance of the principal actor.

Suddenly he is told that his new list must not be announced. Mr. Asquith and Mr. Lloyd George together inform him of one crushing piece of news after another. A Coalition is about to be formed : the inevitable implication is that one of the conditions of the compact is his departure from the Admiralty. Thus all the bright hopes of his morning are rudely dissipated.

Later, his two principal colleagues come forward with a new proposal. The suggestion of the Colonial Office was put forward by the Prime Minister in the presence of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Mr. Lloyd George brought his imagination into play. What had been lost on the sea might be regained on the land. A Colonial

Secretary with Mr. Churchill's military talents might marshal the hosts of the races of Africa and the Dependencies, and rush them to the assistance of the Empire.

While this offer was being made—in fact, it was accepted—the conclave was suddenly interrupted by an urgent message from Mr. Churchill's own office. The gist of it was, "Please come to the Admiralty at once—important news." Mr. Churchill left immediately, and received the startling information that the German High Sea Fleet was coming out, apparently intending battle. Instantly, all thoughts of other matters such as Ministerial employments must have vanished from Mr. Churchill's vision. Here in the great battle in the North Sea would be the vindication of his naval policy—a triumph such as few lifetimes afford any man. Instead of the bald announcement that Mr. Churchill was no longer First Lord of the Admiralty and that his successor had been chosen, there would be a tense scene in the House of Commons, in which white-faced members listened in strained attention while Mr. Churchill announced the greatest victory which the British Navy had ever attained before or since Trafalgar. Would a First Lord who had played Barham to the new Nelson be allowed to go into retirement? And if he did go, he would leave the Admiralty in a manner which would make his exit an imperishable event in British history.

Such, at least, would have been the reflections of any ordinary man in Mr. Churchill's position.

But as confidence, on that eventful Monday, had been replaced by despair—so depression was now succeeded by the growing light of an immense hope. All that afternoon and evening he was rushing towards the probable scene of action every battleship, battle cruiser or torpedo boat that he could lay hands upon. He had no First Sea Lord at the time, and was acting as head of the Admiralty. He sent messages to the Harwich force and to the flotillas and to the submarine and destroyer flotillas at Dover and Yarmouth. He ordered them to proceed to the probable scene of action. He threw his whole naval hand in at once. He held back nothing. If only the Germans would come on ! So Monday evening lengthened with hope. Mr. Churchill slept a little, and rose at 7.0 a.m. on Tuesday to learn that the Germans seemed to be receding towards their base. By 9.0 a.m. it was clear that all was over—and the German High Sea Fleet beyond our reach.

There was an end of the matter. The offer to Churchill of the Colonial Office was afterwards withdrawn owing to strong Tory protests and weak Liberal support, and the failure of the new Trafalgar to eventuate relegated him to the Duchy of Lancaster.* I conclude as I began this story—" What days ! "

*There was an interlude of six months, only to be mentioned because it shows Churchill's boundless fertility of invention and his determination to be in the line of action somewhere. He suggested that he might be made Governor-General and Commander-in-Chief in East Africa, so as to unify all the operations against the Germans in that area. This proposal, too, though somewhat favoured by Bonar Law, Colonial Secretary, finally met with strong opposition and failed to eventuate.

Churchill was thus, on the Tuesday night I saw him at the Admiralty, a man suddenly thrown from power into impotence, and one felt rather as if one had been invited to " come and look on fallen Antony."

What a creature of strange moods he is—always at the top of the wheel of confidence or at the bottom of an intense depression.

Looking back on that long night that we spent in the big silent Admiralty room till day broke, I cannot help reflecting on that extreme duality of mind which marks Churchill above all other men—the charm, the imaginative sympathy of his hours of defeat, the self-confidence, the arrogance of his hours of power and prosperity. That night he was a lost soul, yet full of flashes of wit and humour.

But all those days of our acquaintance were his bad times, and then one could not resist the charm of his companionship or withhold from him the tribute of sympathy.

That Tuesday night he was clinging to the desire of retaining the Admiralty as though the salvation of England depended on it. I believe he would even have made it up with Lord Fisher if that had been the price of remaining there. None the less, so little did he realise the inwardness of the whole situation that he still hoped.

He was anxious that the Tories should support him in this, although it was obvious that it was precisely the Tory backing of Lord Fisher that had thrown him down. He negotiated with Lord Balfour to act as intermediary and as his interpreter

to the Tory leaders. Balfour in his new role was unfavourably received and in fact severely criticised by his colleagues.

My sympathies were entirely with Churchill, for I had heard his speeches and read some of Lord Fisher's letters, and I was more impressed by the lucidity of the speeches than by the volubility of the letters.

None the less, I had to tell him plainly that in my opinion there was no hope.

Churchill refers to this conversation in his own book, when he says that he received a message to this effect from a sure source of information. He was right in his valuation. For Bonar Law had informed me earlier in the day that he and his colleagues would not and could not countenance the re-appointment of Churchill to the Admiralty. I pressed Bonar Law very strongly to retain Churchill at the Admiralty on account of the immense abilities he had already displayed there.

Bonar Law replied that it was useless to argue ; that the Tory party had definitely made up its mind not to have him there—and that, in fact, any attempt to retain Churchill at the Admiralty would result in the complete and sudden collapse of the substructure of the new Coalition Government. He added that Churchill had also lost the confidence of his own Liberal associates. Finally, he authorised me to tell Churchill the substance of his observations.

Yet Churchill still made an appeal on Thursday night to some of the Tory leaders, asking to be

allowed to retain his office, and explaining that his conduct and motives had been greatly traduced, and that there was no real reason for Conservative hostility.

One of the arguments he used in conversation with me was ill calculated to serve his ends with the Tory chiefs. He said that Sir Arthur Wilson had agreed to serve under him and would not serve under anyone else, and he indicated his intention to create exactly that kind of Board to which his opponents most strenuously objected. But as a matter of fact, it made no difference, for the issue was really settled from the start, and in a day or two he realised that the worst had definitely happened.

But as late as Friday, 21 May, he wrote to Bonar Law, setting out in such a vigorous, coherent and concise manner his whole case for desiring to remain at the Admiralty, that I now print it in full :—

Admiralty,
Whitehall.
21.5.15.

My dear Bonar Law,

The rule to follow is what is best calculated to beat the enemy and not what is most likely to please the newspapers. The question of the Dardanelles operations and my differences with Fisher ought to be settled by people who know the facts and not by those who cannot know them. Now you and your friends except Mr. Balfour do not know the facts. On our side *only* the Prime

Minister knows them. The policy and conduct of the Dardanelles operations should be reviewed by the new Cabinet. Every fact shd. be laid before them. They shd. decide and on their decision the composition of the Board of Admiralty shd. depend.

It is not in justice to myself that I am asking for this ; but primarily because of the great operation wh. is in progress, and for wh. I bear a tremendous responsibility. With Sir Arthur Wilson's professional aid I am sure I can discharge that responsibility fully. In view of his statement to the Prime Minister and to the naval Lords that he will serve as First Sea Lord under me, and under no one else, I feel entitled to say that no other personal combination will give so good a chance.

If this view of mine shd. prove to be true it affects the safety of an Army now battling its way forward under many difficulties, and the success of an operation of the utmost consequence for wh. more than 30,000 men have already shed their blood : and I suggest to you that it is your duty to refuse to judge so grave an issue until you know the facts.

My lips are sealed in public, but in a few days all the facts can be placed before you and your friends under official secrecy. I am sure those with whom I hope to work as colleagues and comrades in this great struggle will not allow a newspaper campaign—necessarily conducted in ignorance and not untinged with prejudice—to be the deciding factor in matters of such terrible import.

Personal interests and sympathies ought to be strictly subordinated. It does not matter whether a Minister receives exact and meticulous justice. But what is vital is that from the outset of this new effort we are to make together we shd. be fearless of outside influences and straight with each other. We are coming together not to work on public opinion but to wage war : and by waging successful war we shall dominate public opinion.

I wd. like you to bring this letter to the notice of those with whom I expect soon to act : and I wish to add the following :—

I was sent to the Admiralty 4 years ago. I have always been supported by high professional advice ; but partly through circumstances and partly no doubt through my own methods and inclinations, an exceptional burden has been borne by me. I had to procure the money, the men, the ships and ammunition ; to recast with expert advice the war plans ; to complete in every detail that cd. be foreseen the organisation of the Navy.

Supported by the Prime Minister, I had last year for 4 continuous months of Cabinet meetings to beat down the formidable attack of the Chancellor of the Exchequer backed by 3/4ths of the Cabinet upon the necessary naval estimates. On the approach of war I had to act far in excess of my authority to make the vital arrangements for the safety of the country. I had to mobilise the Fleet without legal sanction and contrary to a Cabinet decision. I have had to face 9 months of war under conditions no man has known, and wh.

were in the early months infinitely more anxious than those wh. confront us now.

Many Sea Lords have come and gone, but during all these 4 years (nearly) I have been according to my patent " solely responsible to Crown and Parliament " and have borne the blame for every failure: and now I present to you an absolutely secure naval position; a Fleet constantly and rapidly growing in strength, and abundantly supplied with munitions of every kind, an organisation working with perfect smoothness and efficiency, and the seas upon wh. no enemy's flag is flown.

Therefore I ask to be judged justly, deliberately and with knowledge. I do not ask for anything else.

Yours very sincerely,
Winston S. Churchill.

Bonar Law replied on the same day :—

21st May, 1915.

My dear Churchill,

I thank you for your letter, which I shall show to my friends, beginning with Austen Chamberlain; but, believe me, what I said to you last night is inevitable.

Yours sincerely,
A. Bonar Law.

Churchill, failing his own retention, was keenly anxious about his successor. He preferred Lord Balfour because that statesman had, on the whole,

agreed with his Dardanelles policy, and was conversant with all the facts in connection with it.

Here, at any rate, he had his desire, and the virgin soil of the Admiralty was immediately fertilised by Lord Balfour's subtle intelligence. I often wonder what the sailors thought of him, though no one could doubt that he would be immensely popular with his subordinates. Sir Henry Jackson became First Sea Lord in Lord Fisher's place.

Such was the amazing story of the struggle at the Admiralty—one which in peace time would have been high comedy of the most exquisite character ; but which, occurring in the middle of a great European conflict, is nothing short of tragedy. I can think of no parallel in history. The First Sea Lord himself vanished, and for some days the British Navy was without an official expert head, and it is surely the last tribute to Lord Fisher's hold on the public imagination that he should still have retained so large a position in the public eye after his proceedings of Saturday, 15 May. But if there was one thing more astounding than his action when he pulled down his blinds at the Admiralty it is this—that he still confidently expected to be recalled to office after it !

It therefore remains for us to add to the Fisher maxims yet another motto, " Don't draw down the blinds."

And here I must break off my narrative to give an analysis of Churchill's conduct and character

as it was displayed in the war up till May 1915.

His attitude from August 1914 onwards was a noble one, too noble to be wise. He cared for the success of the British arms, especially in so far as they could be achieved by the Admiralty, and for nothing else. His passion for this aim was pure, self-devoted, and all-devouring. He failed to remember that he was a politician and as such treading a slippery path; he forgot his political tactics. He thought of himself not as holding a certain position in relation to Liberal colleagues and a Tory Opposition, but as a National Minister secure of support from all men of good-will. Or if he knew that there were pitfalls lying before the man who thought in this way, he walked on careless of them because of his belief in his own objective. If it was a mistake it was the error of a big-minded, though self-willed, man. Actually the rocks were under his keel the whole time, and finally he struck one in the course of his daring pilotage.

To begin with, all his Liberal colleagues did not like his view that the war was the only issue. There was Home Rule, for instance. I can imagine him expressing the opinion that to discuss Home Rule now was " tosh "—because it would settle itself in some quite different way when the war was over. This would give offence to serious-minded Liberals who were still as deeply interested in the Home Rule Bill as were some of the Conservative Shadow Cabinet from the opposite standpoint. At any rate, he never made any

concession to Liberal party feeling, but stuck grimly to the Admiralty.

At the same time, he failed to realise that the Tory opposition did not regard him as a National Minister at all, but still cherished against him a resentment born of pre-war political differences, that they did not trust his conduct of naval affairs, and were quite determined to support in the most violent fashion any sailor who differed with him on an expert question. It would be too long a task to enter into all the ideas which animated the minds of the Conservative rank and file at this moment, but it is true that belief in the naval and military experts and intense opposition to Churchill were dominant articles in their creed.

Churchill did not understand all this, largely because he shut himself up in the Admiralty and hardly ever went to the House of Commons except as a form. As he worked devotedly at his own job, the currents of political opinion slipped by him unnoticed. If he went out to speak at all, it was at meetings in the country. This was patriotic of him—but, as we have seen in the case of the Liverpool meeting, he laid himself open to attack by his enemies even in this endeavour. If he failed in 1915 it was because he showed himself too confident to be prudent. He neither tied the Liberals to him nor conciliated the Tories.

If Churchill was avid of power and office during the war, and intensely depressed whenever he was excluded from active official participation in its conduct, the blame can only be attached to his assurance and self-confidence.

He cared for the Empire profoundly, and he was honestly convinced that only by his advice and methods it could be saved. His ambition was in essence disinterested. He suffered tortures when he thought that lesser men were mismanaging the business.

I do not say that he was always wise—but his patriotism burnt with a pure flame throughout. Hard fighter as he is in debate, he is a man almost devoid of rancour. A defeat does not sour him, even though it depresses him, nor does it turn him into a hater of the successful half of political mankind. And he possesses another virtue—exceptionally rare in politics—or, for that matter, almost anywhere. He is strictly honest and truthful to other people, down to the smallest details of his life. He will not even tell what is usually known as a " dinner lie " to get out of a distasteful engagement. Yet he frequently deceives himself.

. . . . .

The announcement of the formation of the Coalition Government was made by Asquith and Bonar Law in the House of Commons on Wednesday, 19 May 1915. The whole crisis had taken well under a week.

The Coalition had a very tepid reception from the Press. The Liberal rank and file were annoyed by what seemed a kind of inexplicable overthrow. Old friends had to be excluded from office to make room for the newcomers—a painful business. The stalwart Tories thought the Government should not have been saved, even in part, and

that their own side would then have had a monopoly of office. The leaders on both sides also had to adjust themselves to the new situation.

The principal Unionist leaders gave a shining example at once of patriotism and disinterestedness. They were burningly eager to take office, not for its own sake, but because they honestly thought that their inclusion in the Ministry would infuse a new vigour and efficiency into the conduct of the war. They had chafed at the impotence to serve their country which Opposition imposed. They believed that they had talents which could be put to great national use and that a combination of the best men on both sides in office must be stronger than a one-party rule. If some of these ideas turned out to be fallacious, this does not reflect on the zeal and integrity of the men who entertained them.

That such professions were not merely the cloak of concealed ambition is proved by the readiness each individual showed to stand down for any other colleague whose abilities might be adjudged greater than his. Lord Lansdowne was ready to stand out altogether if his inclusion would prejudice the chances of Lord Curzon or Lord Selborne. Sir Austen Chamberlain was most anxious that no question of his claim should stand in the way of the party leader becoming Chancellor of the Exchequer in the event of his not preferring or securing the new Ministry of Munitions. I shall come in a moment to Bonar Law's own act of self-abnegation. Lord Long also indicated his complete willingness either to serve

or stand aside, as circumstances might dictate. He added that he was inclined to take exception to two important Liberal personalities as members of the joint Ministry, namely, Lloyd George and McKenna. And in this he showed a curious prescience—for they were the two Ministers whose internecine feuds caused the head of the new Ministry some of his most severe trials. Long finished by assuring Bonar Law that, office or no office, he should have his unswerving support as a private member of Parliament.

I will finish the list with the striking example of Lord Finlay, who had by prescription the highest claim to any law office which was within the power of the Conservative party to offer him.

Lord Finlay placed his claim for office at the absolute disposal of his leader, and paid the price for his renunciation without a murmur. On the Liberal side there were some similar acts of self-sacrifice. Sir John Simon refused the great prize of his profession, the Lord Chancellorship, in order to stay at the Home Office, and other Ministers announced their willingness to fall into any arrangement which would make the formation of the Coalition Ministry easier.

CHAPTER X

THE FIRST INTRIGUE

IT is regrettable to have to relate that this general attitude of sacrifice was not shared either by the Prime Minister or one or two of his principal colleagues. These approached the formation of the new Ministry, not in a spirit of frank union with their late opponents, but with the intention of doing the best they could, if not for themselves, at any rate for their party. Briefly the object of this intrigue of May 1915 was to keep the Conservatives, and especially their leader, out of their fair share of the great offices in the Cabinet. It was this original move which made the whole edifice of the first Coalition shaky from the very beginning and ultimately prepared the way for the ruin of Mr. Asquith as Prime Minister.

Let us consider the situation. The Premiership was not vacant, nor was the Foreign Office, nor the War Office. But there were besides two positions of great importance—the Chancellorship of the Exchequer and the Ministry of Munitions. It was obvious that Bonar Law, as leader of an equal force in the Cabinet, had a prescriptive right to one or other of these offices. Mr. Lloyd George, as Chancellor, had no doubt an equal

right to remain where he was if he wished. That was all. The Liberal Leadership, on the contrary, decided that by one method or another Bonar Law was to be kept out of both these offices—so that the Liberals would hold the Premiership, the Foreign Office, the Exchequer, and the Ministry of Munitions—obviously a monstrous inequality in the distribution of power.

Mr. Asquith's first proposal to keep Bonar Law out was to take the Exchequer himself in addition to the Premiership, and send Lloyd George to Munitions. The duplication of the Premiership and the Treasury in the middle of a great war was so obviously inadmissible that it was at once objected to and abandoned.

The Prime Minister then summoned several of those of his Liberal colleagues who were to have Cabinet places in the new Administration to a meeting and explained the position to them. He had, he said, the names of the Conservative members of the Administration to be. The Opposition claimed and would have half the seats in the Cabinet—that was settled. There remained the question of the distribution of offices. There was a general concurrence that none of the Tories were to have any of the big places—or to put it more particularly—the problem was to prevent Bonar Law from being made either Chancellor of the Exchequer or Minister of Munitions. Those who were present and had a personal acquaintance with Bonar Law knew that in his simple patriotism they had the surest instrument to effect their purpose.

When the conference was over, several of the Liberal leaders adjourned to Mr. Lloyd George's room to discuss details. It was there that one of them proposed a definite plan. Lloyd George should go to Munitions, and some Liberal should take the Exchequer on condition that he was ready to vacate if Lloyd George wished to take it back in the future. This was agreed to. Mr. McKenna was selected to be the warming pan. The Prime Minister sent for him and offered him the Treasury on these precise terms—explaining that it was necessary, since the Liberals representing the majority in the House of Commons ought to hold the great offices. Mr. McKenna replied in effect that he felt himself bound to acquiesce in any request the Prime Minister made to him, and to accept any conditions imposed on him in a grave national emergency. In taking this attitude he was undoubtedly perfectly sincere. He never thought, however, that the condition under which he was bound to resign the Treasury was ever likely to be fulfilled. He felt sure that Mr. Lloyd George would not in any case return to the Exchequer—and so it proved.

I cannot but reflect with some little amusement on the irony which crowned this event. McKenna never vacated the Exchequer, but, on the contrary, was within a little over a year fighting Lloyd George implacably and successfully in the War Cabinet. Lloyd George was appealing to Bonar Law to come to his help, and the latter was for some weeks restrained from doing so because of the deep impression this episode of the offices

had left on his mind. Lastly, when Mr. McKenna was at the Treasury he passed a Tariff which gave all the orthodox Free Traders the shock of their lives—though it had been especially asserted that a Tariff Reformer like Bonar Law should not be Chancellor.

The proposal of the Liberal chiefs now agreed to was sufficiently amazing. The Conservatives, the greatest individual party in the Commons, had with great reluctance come to the rescue of a falling Government; its members came in not as subordinates, but as allies; not because their presence was desired, but because it could not be spared.

The head of that party in the House, therefore, entered the Ministry not as an ordinary subordinate, but as an independent potentate, capable of dealing on almost equal terms with the Prime Minister. One breath of his could destroy the Government in a night.

Even if he held his hand for ever there might come a day when he would need every ounce of status and authority which the highest office could give him to keep his own followers in line.

Later on Mr. Asquith and his friends had to pay a bitter price for joining in a game which tended to depreciate Bonar Law's status in his own party, to weaken his authority over it, and so to render the first Coalition more susceptible to attack from the Die-hards of the Tory Right. From the very moment that the scheme for this transaction over offices was set on foot in Downing Street the first Coalition was doomed.

If Mr. Asquith had possessed the ears to hear with he would have recognised that the death-knell of his Administration was set ringing by this intrigue.

It remained to carry the plan into effect. First of all, a story was put about that Mr. Scott, the well-known and highly-respected Editor of the "Manchester Guardian," had declared, as an uncompromising Free Trader, that nobody of Bonar Law's fiscal opinions could be made Chancellor of the Exchequer by a Liberal Prime Minister. That difficulty, of course—if it ever existed—could have been surmounted by sending Bonar Law to Munitions. In fact, both Lord Balfour and Lord Kitchener indicated a preference for the appointment of Bonar Law to Munitions—since it never occurred to them to imagine that the Leader of the Opposition had no choice open.

Finally, it dawned on Bonar Law that he was to be jockeyed out of both the big vacant posts. The Prime Minister was in a difficulty, for he could not form a Ministry at all without Bonar Law's concurrence. He suggested an interview between Bonar Law and Lloyd George. Here Lloyd George made to his competitor that kind of appeal to his shining qualities of disinterestedness and patriotism which Bonar Law could never resist even though he ought to have done so.

He yielded to the appeal, but on returning to Mr. Asquith to announce the sacrifice, he remarked truly enough: "You mustn't think I am doing this because I am compelled to. I know very well I can have what I want simply by lifting

my little finger. But I won't fight. I am here to show you how to run a Coalition Government by forbearance and concession." With this renunciation the Tory leader departed to the dignified obscurity (in war time) of the Colonial Office.

When Bonar Law went out that morning to the meetings with Mr. Asquith and Mr. Lloyd George which I have just described he promised his friends that, whatever happened, he would not give way; he returned to inform them that he had done so! The truth of the matter is that over and over again in his career Bonar Law would have given rein to this passion for self-abnegation if others had not held up his hands.

If Bonar Law would not contend for his proper position himself it was at least the duty of his Conservative colleagues to make a stand on his behalf in the interests of their own position in and influence on the new Government.

As it was, the Conservative meeting at Lansdowne House ratified the appointments and concurred with hardly a murmur in a decision which put a slight on the party chief and damaged both his authority and the prestige of the party. When I asked one colleague to make an effort to have things put right, he said: "It's all settled now, and it's too late to do anything."

Neither the Liberal nor the Conservative leaders saw that Conservative prestige and authority might be wanted badly some day, for already there were anxious mutterings among the Tory rank and file.

The number of claimants for the smaller posts were innumerable, and there was a great scarcity of offices in the second grade.

The Tories had imagined that the fall of the Government was certain to take place if their own leaders did not hold out a helping hand. They believed that a dissolution would have followed and returned them to office independent of all other sections whatever, and that in any case such a course would have given them a larger share of the spoils of office even in a Coalition Government. Long and loud were the complaints of those who were marked out for office in the old days but were now excluded through lack of room.

Some amusing discussions took place while the Lloyd-George-Bonar-Law controversy was still unsettled, and it was thought that one would go to the Exchequer and one to Munitions.

In this the Press, or rather, some editors, took a lively but secret part. The Press is divided into two schools, those of open and secret diplomacy. The open diplomats, of whom Lord Northcliffe was then the chief, enforce their demands by a public agitation. The secret diplomats are the editors who try to get their way by influence, cajolery and argument ; and these, at moments of political disturbance, carry far more weight than the most eminent private Member of Parliament.

The battle for the smaller positions on the Conservative side was, as I have indicated, far more fierce than anything which took place at the top, where self-abnegation ruled.

I may say this without offence because personally I did not take advantage of such opportunity of minor office as was open to me.

One ought not to be too ready to blame the contestants. The Conservatives had been out of office for eight or nine years. In that period men who had worked assiduously at politics all their lives saw themselves passing out on the wrong side of middle-age without any official recognition of their hard work and real abilities. They were mostly too old for active soldiering, they were desperately anxious to serve their country in some tangible and obvious form, and they were knocking in crowds at a narrow gate.

One noble gesture, however, was made by all the Conservative aspirants for power from the highest to the lowest. It was called the self-denying ordinance—because it laid down that no Conservative member of Parliament serving at the front should be eligible for office. This had the double advantage of maintaining the strength of the firing line, and diminishing the queue waiting outside the portals of Whitehall.

The Law offices, of course, are things standing apart. For some reason or another the distribution of these offices always seems to evoke the most terrible contentions. No one disputed the claim of Lord Carson to a big position. On the contrary, Liberals and Conservatives were united in the belief that he was certain to prove a most effective Minister in war time. And in any case he had already held Law office in a Conservative Administration. He was clearly indicated for the

Attorney-Generalship. But if Carson was Attorney-General, only one other legal post was open to a Conservative. A Coalition could not appoint a Tory Lord Chancellor, a Tory Attorney-General, and a Tory Solicitor-General. The inclusion of Lord Birkenhead as Solicitor General deprived an old-time Conservative peer of office, for the Liberals flatly declined to take in a single other Tory.

Birkenhead owed his promotion to Bonar Law, who was determined to provide for him, even in the face of great difficulties. But after all, Birkenhead was a bigger figure in politics than most of his competitors. His appointment meant that the Lord Chancellorship must go to a Liberal. Mr. Asquith made the first offer of the position of Lord Chancellor to Sir John Simon, who by his record at the Bar and in the House of Commons was fully entitled to the post. Simon declined the proposal, thus showing that he was determined to remain in active politics and wanted to be Prime Minister before his career was ended. In default of Simon, Mr. Asquith turned to Buckmaster, the Solicitor-General in the late Government, as the next available Liberal. It is no exaggeration to say that this appointment was a great surprise. Lord Buckmaster was a very young man for the post. He had made no special position for himself in the House of Commons. He had succeeded Lord Birkenhead at the Press Bureau—an awkward but not important office.

But there it was ; political exigencies had to be

satisfied. Carson must, of course, as the senior, have the Attorney-Generalship, and if, as Bonar Law insisted, room had to be found for Birkenhead as Solicitor-General, then Buckmaster must go upstairs. In this indirect way Bonar Law really made Buckmaster Lord Chancellor.

This almost accidental appointment turned out an excellent one. Buckmaster proved a splendid Lord Chancellor—and not only as a lawyer. He became the principal Liberal speaker in the House of Lords—one of the greatest orators I have heard there in my time. Listening to him there, it was impossible to understand why I had failed to appreciate his speeches in the House of Commons—yet such was undoubtedly the case.

The Ministry was by now pretty well complete, but, strange to relate, one quite unimportant incident almost wrecked it when all was settled. I have told of the keen desire for office which animated some of the older Tories, and the case of the Irish Chancellorship was a queer outcrop of this frame of mind. This had been promised to Campbell (now Lord Glenavy), whose position at the Irish Bar gave him a right to expect the post. But, Mr. Asquith going on forming his Ministry without filling the appointment, and Mr. Redmond objecting, he was finally told that he could not have it.

At this there was an uproar as if the heavens or the Empire were about to fall, and several prominent Ministers, including in particular Bonar Law, actually threatened to resign and break up the new Administration. The best comment on

the whole matter was made by Mr. Birrell. "It is admittedly a comparatively very small matter for either side to hold out about, and were a rupture to follow upon it I do not think that outsiders could be got to believe that it really occurred on so contemptible an issue."

By the middle of June the agonies of Cabinet-making were over, and on the 14th of that month I returned to France, pondering on the stability of the new Government and wondering what its fate would be.

So was formed with little enthusiasm on the part of its creators and in an atmosphere of doubt and hesitation, the first Coalition Government. With its Liberal predecessor discredited, it seemed that if this Ministry failed too the resources of Parliamentary government would be exhausted, and that nothing, therefore, except this frail bark stood between the nation and the Atlantic Ocean of chaos. How little can any man foresee, and who could have believed in May 1915 that it would not be till this Government had fallen into decrepitude and finally into ruin that the hope of England would rise, and that a far stronger, more active, and more efficient successor would carry the Empire through the conclusion of a triumphant war to the celebration of a victorious peace?

CHAPTER XI

FRICTION

THE summer of 1915 was marked by one episode of special political significance. With the frequent and inevitable absences of the Prime Minister from the House of Commons it became necessary to make a formal appointment to the Deputy Leadership of the House. Considering the sacrifices that Bonar Law had made in May and the obvious justice of the view that the Tory leader in the Coalition should act as second in command, there is no doubt but that Bonar Law had a reasonable claim to the appointment. He certainly, however, set about obtaining it in rather an unfortunate manner, which gave Mr. Lloyd George the legitimate cause of complaint that Bonar Law and the Prime Minister were settling the whole affair over his head and without his knowledge. Lloyd George pleaded that as Chancellor of the Exchequer he had in fact been for years Deputy Leader, and should not be deprived of his post. Finally, Lloyd George made the old appeal to Bonar Law's besetting virtue, and once again Bonar Law retired in Lloyd George's favour. The effect of the episode was a separa-

tion between Lloyd George and Bonar Law, both of whom were showing a tendency to combine in complaining of the mismanagement of affairs, especially at the War Office.

As the summer drew on and the Liberal and Conservative Ministers began to become acquainted with one another as working colleagues, certain re-alignments took place. Nor were the various frictions which were set up those of party against party. Rather they cut clean across old party distinctions. As the very composition of the Government had originally been due to an intrigue, so its life was being continually weakened by the growing dissensions of little groups within it—Liberal often allying with Tory against Tory, or Liberal fighting Liberal.

Of the first type of mischief, a salient instance was the Prime Minister's continual exaltation of Lord Curzon at the expense of Bonar Law, with which I shall deal more fully in a sketch of Lord Curzon's character. Why, if Mr. Asquith wanted some kind of Conservative counterpoise to the official Tory Chief, he did not select Lord Lansdowne, the Leader in the Lords, it is impossible to say. The fact remains that he preferred Lord Curzon.

The Prime Minister proposed about this time to appoint a Cabinet Committee to deal with the issue of Compulsion. At first he submitted a list which included the name of Bonar Law. Then he designated a Committee composed of Curzon, Chamberlain, Selborne, Crewe and Churchill. Bonar Law was angry, particularly

Olive Edis, F.R.P.S.

"In another week," Asquith said,
"I shall have sat in this Chair
for seven years."

THE CABINET ROOM, 10 DOWNING STREET.

when he was informed that the Prime Minister had actually consulted Curzon as to the composition of the Committee. Any other Minister would have resigned. Bonar Law always effaced himself.

The battle of Liberal against Liberal was a far more serious matter. We have seen that Lloyd George and McKenna had agreed amicably enough to part Bonar Law's Ministerial heritage among them. Here their agreement ended—and a conflict arose which lasted as long as the Ministry and was one of the principal factors which accounted for its fall. This tension between the new Minister of Munitions and his successor at the Treasury continually increased.

On one occasion Asquith invited Lloyd George and McKenna to meet him in the Cabinet Room for the express purpose of effecting a reconciliation. The attempt failed. It appeared the meeting would end in disaster. Asquith was sitting in the chair which he always occupied at the Cabinet.

"In another week," he said, "I shall have sat in this chair for seven years. If I have the slightest reason to think there is anyone among you who has the faintest suspicion about me I will glady abandon it."

Asquith has written an account of this interview. He says the natural anger of the irreconciliables dissolved like frost in a sudden thaw when he uttered these sentences. They both exclaimed:

"The day you leave that chair the rest of us disappear, never to return."

The only other person who seems to have made

any real attempt to keep the peace between the protagonists was Lord Reading.

Had Lord Reading cared to resign the Chief Justiceship, he might have held almost any Ministerial post. He seemed, however, content with the influence he could exert on others, and with the exercise of his judicial functions, which he continued to perform. He had been a non-official adviser of Lloyd George at the Treasury, but on the change of Chancellor he still continued this task and used to help McKenna. He was, therefore, well placed to act as mediator between old Chancellor and new, and never ceased to preach peace and pursue it.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury was Mr. E. S. Montagu (later Secretary of State for India), and had he joined his potent voice to Lord Reading's in advocating compromise and agreement, the fatal dissension between Lloyd George and McKenna might have been healed. Montagu unfortunately did not look on the matter in this light. He belonged to the central Asquithian group in the Cabinet, to which McKenna too was allied, and as an Asquithian he preferred to support McKenna rather than Lloyd George. So another chance of avoiding disruption was missed.

Finally, both the contending Ministers were surrounded by a group of henchmen consisting of voluntary political assistants. These sometimes had differences of their own which helped to exasperate each potentate against the other. For instance, a bitter quarrel which was carried on

between Lord Riddell, who was the friend of Lloyd George, and the late Sir Hedley Le Bas, who was giving McKenna valuable assistance at the Treasury, was not helpful in promoting cordial relations between their respective chiefs.

Of all the actors concerned in this struggle the role assumed by the Prime Minister was the most amazing. He watched the feud develop and intensify with the kind of mild interest with which a hardened first-nighter may witness the development of a problem play. He showed no sign of realising that his own fortunes and those of his Ministry were at stake.

In those summer months Mr. Asquith still possessed prestige and power sufficient to quell disputants. His inclination was to McKenna. He was then strong enough to face even Lloyd George's resignation.

Obviously it was a matter of vital concern to him that he should either bring about a reconciliation between the opponents, or that he should utterly crush one or the other. Instead of this, he did nothing for peace, favoured McKenna just enough to irritate the Minister of Munitions, and took no steps whatever to ensure that the irritated Minister should be rendered harmless.

We all know that in the ultimate struggle which took place at the end of this year Lloyd George proved victorious. But I cannot withhold a tribute of sympathy with McKenna in his difficult succession to the Treasury.

Life at the Treasury was not made easy by the attitude of the Governor of the Bank of England.

The late Lord Cunliffe, who presided over the Bank, had found its importance, and consequently his own, swollen out of all proportion by the advent of war conditions. He became practically a dictatorial authority. In Lloyd George's time at the Treasury, the Chancellor and the Governor had worked amicably enough together. This was rather surprising, because Lord Cunliffe was a shrewd, hard-headed man, gruff and unpopular with his own directors, and with no temperament. One would not, therefore, expect him to find much in common with Mr. Lloyd George. Yet the fact remains that they got on well together, probably in virtue of the Governor having his own way entirely.

On the other hand, Cunliffe soon became a thorn in McKenna's side. The new Chancellor, who possessed a natural aptitude for finance, did not pursue Lloyd George's methods with Cunliffe. The latter, satiated with complete power, did not welcome a different type of Chancellor, who had his own views in many matters previously left entirely to Lord Cunliffe. And whenever the two men had a disagreement McKenna was reminded of the good old days when Lloyd George was Chancellor. Thus Lord Cunliffe unwittingly and accidentally intensified the feeling between the two statesmen.

Eventually McKenna asserted the claims of the Treasury, though it was not until Bonar Law's Chancellorship that a final pitched battle took place, which resulted in Lord Cunliffe's ultimate retirement.

McKenna's first victory is enshrined in a dramatic story. The Chancellor was oppressed by the immense obligations in expenditure which we were incurring in the United States for the purchase of war stores of all kinds, and felt the urgent need to acquire dollars. In fact, towards the end of his time at the Treasury he was spending 60,000,000 dollars a week in America. He would frequently urge on Lord Cunliffe the necessity of providing more bank balances for the Government in the United States, or, in other words, cash in hand for immediate payments. Lord Cunliffe would reply invariably, " Mr. Chancellor, this is a matter of exchange, and the responsibility here lies with me "—a strong hint not to meddle.

So matters went on until one hot summer afternoon, when Lord Cunliffe sought out the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the House of Commons. There was perturbation and a sense of crisis in the air—and, indeed, he had to disclose a most serious situation. He produced two telegrams from Morgans in New York, the financial agents of the Government in America, to Morgans in London. The gist of them was that orders for £52,000,000 worth of war material had been given by the British Fighting Services in the United States ; that the contracts waited to be signed ; that before signature £13,000,000 or 65,000,000 dollars, must be paid down. The telegrams added that any delay in payment would affect British credit adversely.

The message was alarming, because there were no Government balances in the United States to

meet this demand for 65,000,000 dollars. Unless prompt payment—the essence of sustaining credit—was made, a dangerous and damaging blow would be dealt to the financial prestige of the British nation in New York. What had weakened would slip towards the abyss.

Such was the tale of Lord Cunliffe. McKenna replied: "But, Mr. Governor, this is what you call a matter of exchange. Is it not for you?" It was a natural, if too severe, retort. "Oh, don't talk like that," replied Lord Cunliffe—an answer which would avert the wrath of the most hard-hearted of Chancellors. "What is to be done?"

Finally McKenna said, "Leave it to me." And in that sentence was contained the nullification of the late Lord Cunliffe's claim to supreme control over the national finance.

McKenna certainly acted with extraordinary courage and energy on that stifling summer evening. He sent instantly for the heads of the Prudential Assurance Company—Sir Thomas Dewey, Mr. Thompson, Sir Joseph Burn, and Sir George May—and asked them how much the Prudential had got in American securities. The answer was 40,000,000 dollars. "Will you give them to me and let me settle later?" said the Chancellor. The directors instantly replied that they would. "Then let the Bank of England have them by ten o'clock to-morrow morning." The Bank of England supplied another £5,000,000 in gold. The whole 65,000,000 dollars was promptly paid into the Morgan House in London

"Leave it to me."

THE RT. HON. REGINALD MCKENNA.

—the contracts were signed, and the situation, as grave as any which occurred on the Home Front, was saved.

The Prudential had deserved well of England that day. So had the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

What is Mr. McKenna's character and nature? His abilities are brilliant and his logic remorseless. He is angular, emphatic, and positive. He likes to assert his view, and if you run against some projecting bump in his opinions you must merely nurse a bruise. McKenna has the satisfaction of believing that among politicians whose judgment on politics is almost invariably bad his opinion is always the best. Yet this self-assertiveness and strength of opinion and conviction go hand in hand with a most lovable disposition. One might almost say that the more McKenna infuriates you by his intellectual decision, the more you feel drawn towards him personally. He evokes affection naturally. That is the reason why he received daily doses of warm approval from Reading and Montagu at the Exchequer. And because of this same disposition he can also give flattery with devastating effect. The best judge of a man is his own family. McKenna need not fear this last judgment in a circle in which he is regarded with devotion.

Yet he has been as unlucky a politician as Lloyd George has been lucky. On every crucial occasion the gods have loaded the dice against him—and through no perceptible fault of his own judgment. In the Dreadnought campaign of 1908 he was unmercifully and quite wrongly abused by

the pacifists and the Big Navyites alike—and finally superseded. In 1915 and 1916 he found himself in rivalry with the most powerful political force which England had seen since the days of Gladstone. He might have been Prime Minister after Bonar Law's death, but for a trifling electioneering difficulty—or, at least, a little deflection of the helm of judgment at a critical moment. That he would have made a most efficient Prime Minister of modern times no one can doubt.

Lastly, of all the political colleagues of the Liberal group that Bonar Law had to deal with in 1915 and afterwards, McKenna became his closest and most intimate friend.

CHAPTER XII

GALLIPOLI

THE responsibility of various soldiers, sailors, and Ministers for the inception of the Dardanelles adventure has been definitely and publicly fixed by the Report of the Dardanelles Commission. And even to give a summary of the military operations would be tedious. The narrative in this chapter will therefore be confined to the struggle in the Government to secure evacuation after the failure of the Suvla Bay operations in August 1915.

On this subject the Cabinet was divided into two opposing groups with here and there a Minister shifting backwards and forwards between them. This issue absolutely obsessed the minds of Ministers all through the late summer and early autumn of 1915. Important as it was, it yet relegated to the background matters even more important.

This obsession was perhaps due to the fact that the fight inside the Government took on all the zest of a pre-war combat between parties. Anti-Evacuationist fought Evacuationist with a sort of partisan will and was repaid in kind.

Bonar Law was the leader of the group which favoured retirement, and Churchill, who was consistent in his advocacy of the Dardanelles adventure throughout, led the section which was for going on to the bitter end.

Here Churchill found a powerful reinforcement for his "forward policy" among the Tories who had been admitted to the Government in May 1915. The Tory dwells greatly on "prestige," particularly in the East; the national honour is dear to his heart, and the idea of British soldiers retiring before Turks was odious to all.* This group still thought that another push might do the trick, and favoured a dogged persistence in the Peninsula. Its adherents were Curzon,† Balfour,‡ Birkenhead, and, curiously enough in the light of after events, Lansdowne. Carson occupied a position all of his own in relation to the question of the hour; his view was that you must either collect large reinforcements and make a great effort or you must evacuate. This policy of "get on or get out" made him susceptible to

*Lord Kitchener had said as long back as Feb. 24: "The effect of a defeat in the Orient would be very serious. There could be no going back." cf. First Report Dardanelles Commission, p. 32.

†As the result of a conversation with General Robertson, Colonel Repington writes on Oct. 21, 1915, as follows: "Curzon and one or two others oppose the withdrawal from the Dardanelles on account of the loss of prestige and the resulting danger in Egypt and India." cf. "The First World War, 1914-1918," by Colonel Repington, Vol. I., p. 51.

‡Mr. Churchill had been especially anxious that Lord Balfour should succeed him at the Admiralty, since they saw eye to eye on naval questions. cf. "The World Crisis, 1915," by the Right Hon. Winston S. Churchill, p. 366.

appeals from Churchill and the Die-hards; on the other hand, it was in practice an advocacy of retirement because there were no great reinforcements available. Bonar Law was the pioneer of evacuation; Chamberlain followed him in the end, and so did Long, with some searchings of heart.

The Tory party was therefore split almost exactly down the middle.

Signs of dissension among the authorities directing the war began to appear above the horizon in September 1915. This cause is not far to seek. In the Balkans a series of events were maturing which promised succour to the Turks, danger to our men in Gallipoli, and threatened us with the need of a new Mediterranean Army. On 17 September Belgrade was evacuated before an overwhelming Austrian force. On the 25th Bulgaria declared war against the Allies, and it was obvious that unless something drastic could be done a few weeks would see the linking-up of Berlin with Constantinople. Already in the first week of September Lord Carson, as he indicated subsequently in his resignation speech, was brooding uncomfortably over the situation in the Balkans. He had begun to enter protests against further sacrifices in Gallipoli, and had denounced our lack of knowledge and method in the Eastern campaign. At that time he made no mention of Serbia at all; but he did indicate that resignation might soon prove for him the better part. But by the end of September Serbia had become a kind of pendant to the dispute in the Government over the

evacuation of the Dardanelles, if only because a relief force for Serbia must in the main come from Gallipoli.

The first real crisis occurred in October. Already, on 5 October, two divisions had been diverted from Gallipoli to Salonika as a kind of belated effort to help the Serbians, who were now in headlong retreat before the Austrians on the north and the Bulgarians on the south-west. But our experts could hold out no hope of a sufficiently strong army being brought in time from the West, either to save the Serbian Army or to block the Germans on the Constantinople railway.

The advocates of evacuation in Gallipoli now came out in full force. Bonar Law took the view that a very short time would see German munitions and officers pouring into Constantinople, and that our men on the shell-swept sea-coast would be in the gravest danger if they were not removed promptly, and a term put to an enterprise which had obviously failed. Furthermore, the Salonika expedition was likely to draw heavily on what limited resources we could spare for the Mediterranean. He made no condemnation of the expedition to the Dardanelles as such; he simply said it had failed, and that to avoid disaster we must cut our losses.

Lloyd George was with him, though his point of view was different. He was not a Dardanelles man, neither was he a Westerner; he was a Balkanite. During this critical time he was fulminating in private with a kind of terrible eloquence against those

who would spare forces for the Dardanelles or forces for the West, but would not spare a soldier to hold Greece and Rumania to our side and save Serbia and the Constantinople railway.

Therefore, though he was for evacuation, and though he denounced those who, instead of coming to a clear-cut decision, sent out a general "trawling round the Mediterranean for a policy," he had not Bonar Law's singleness of purpose; he would come to the fence, but wouldn't jump it. He appeared half-hearted over the business, and so we have the curious picture of Lloyd George, the fighting man, sound enough in view, but refusing to fight, and Bonar Law, the man of peace and good-will, fighting to the death! It is fair to say Lloyd George's friends declare in defence that he was so busily engaged in producing munitions that he had no time at all to spare for anything else.

I always understood that Lord Long's private views coincided with those of Mr. Lloyd George. Sir Austen Chamberlain was, in principle, inclined to support Bonar Law. The main opposition was led by Churchill and Kitchener, with their Tory Die-hards. The Prime Minister sat on the fence, anxiously struggling to avert the disruption of the Government. It was finally decided to recall General Sir Ian Hamilton (14 October 1915) and to send out General Monro to report on whether we should evacuate or not. Bonar Law protested vigorously against the waste of time involved in this proceeding, but such devices were dear to the heart of Mr. Asquith when facing a storm.

On the 15th October 1915, Lord Carson tendered his resignation, thus adding to the prevailing stress, but his explanation was not presented to the House of Commons until 2 November. He gave a variety of reasons, such as the failure to evacuate, the failure to help Serbia, our lack of general grip in the war, and the monstrous debates of a swollen Cabinet. The general impression that he gave one at the time was that he was suffering from a vague discontent with the whole administration of the war, a kind of foreboding of disaster, and was anxious to produce a crisis from which a better state of affairs might emerge.

As it turned out, his resignation was unfortunately timed. The only means of helping Serbia was to clear the Army out of Gallipoli and land it in Salonika. His single-handed resignation was not sufficient to effect this, whereas if he had stayed on he would have been of the greatest assistance to Bonar Law in fighting the decisive battle for evacuation. By putting his resignation alongside his leader's he would have immensely strengthened his hands and possibly helped to expedite the whole proceedings. Resignations in echelon, like attacks, are always a mistake.

On 31st October General Monro telegraphed home a report strongly favouring prompt evacuation.

In the first week of November everything rushed to an acute crisis. On 5 November the remains of the Serbian Army were making their last stand in the region of the Babluna Pass, and the Allied Expeditionary Force, though it got

to within ten miles of them, was too weak to effect anything. After that the Serbians retired westward and our men back to Salonika.

November 3 and 4 were stormy times for the Government, and for four days a grave state of crisis existed. General Monro's report had to be considered. It was out-and-out for evacuation on purely military grounds. Asked by telegraph for the opinion of the corps commanders, he reported Byng and Davies for evacuation and Birdwood against. General Birdwood, however, based his opinion on political grounds. The Evacuationists pressed strongly for immediate action upon this report, as will be seen from the subjoined letter of Bonar Law.

None the less, so formidable was the opposition, that the Prime Minister made another attempt to secure a postponement of the decision. This took the form of a proposal to send out Lord Kitchener on a mission to do over again what General Monro had just done. The supporters of retirement made this concession with great reluctance. Consent was wrung by the force of surprise, even from Bonar Law. After the meeting I had a conversation with him and Carson at the Hyde Park Hotel. Bonar Law's situation was difficult; his state of mind peculiar; and his final action the most interesting thing that I have ever seen in politics.

He believed that he had been rushed at the Cabinet into consenting to postpone evacuation until Lord Kitchener had reported. He was quite certain that the decision was a wrong one.

He felt that in the discharge of his public duty he was responsible for thousands of lives, which might be lost by his original error and by his present inaction. Yet he had undoubtedly consented to the view of the Cabinet. If he went back on that consent, he would lay himself open to all kinds of damaging, because in part well-founded, charges. Colleagues would say that such changes of mind were intolerable, and that it was impossible to do Government business on such a basis at all.

And, indeed, all this and more was said by opponents. He had placed himself, in fact, in the weakest possible position from which to launch an ultimatum. If he did so, he must either be inexpressibly damaged or incredibly strengthened. People might either say " Here is a man who will not abide by his agreements and he is worthless " ; or they might say, " Here is a man with so strong a conception of his moral duty that he dares to sacrifice even his reputation for an honourable consistency in the cause that he thinks right."

Once Bonar Law was convinced that to wait for Lord Kitchener's report was to gamble for no real object with life on a vast scale, he took his decision and never flinched again from it. He drew up and despatched the following letter to the Prime Minister.

My dear Prime Minister,

When you read to us yesterday General Monro's report, I expected it would be followed

by the decision to make preparations for the evacuation of the Dardanelles with the utmost possible rapidity. You proposed instead that Lord Kitchener should do once again the work which had already been done by General Monro, which involves a further delay, and this proposal was agreed to by the Cabinet.

I felt that we were taking this very course, but there was so little time for consideration I acquiesced in the decision. I have now had time to give further thought to the subject, and am convinced that the decision at which we arrived is not only wrong, but indefensible, and this view is confirmed by the report which was given me last night by Mr. Lloyd George that our Ambassador at Rome has informed us that the Germans have already established communication with Constantinople.

As soon as it became evident that we could not prevent this communication I was convinced that our position at Gallipoli was untenable, and that we ought to abandon it. I circulated a memorandum to the Cabinet putting this view as strongly as I could, and you will perhaps remember that when it was proposed that General Monro should be sent out I stated to the Cabinet that in my opinion we ought to decide at once to evacuate the Peninsula, that I only refrained from pressing this proposal because I knew that I could not obtain the support of a majority of the Cabinet, and because, from the nature of the case, it was impossible to discuss the subject in Par-

liament and obtain a decision of the House of Commons.

I therefore consented to the delay necessitated by General Monro's visit, and now it is proposed to have a further delay, for which there is, I think, no justification, and which is only explained by the desire to postpone a disagreeable but an inevitable decision. Nothing seems to me more certain than that the Germans will regard the destruction of our forces in Gallipoli as the main object of their operations in the Balkans. They will not delay, and if, as I believe is the case, the whole Cabinet realises now that we must withdraw from the Dardanelles, then every moment is precious, and the delay of ten days at least involved in Lord Kitchener's visit is, in my opinion, a fatal error.

If, as is at least possible, this delay may result in the destruction of our force, a weight of responsibility will rest upon the Cabinet which I am not prepared to share. I therefore earnestly request you to call at once a meeting of the Cabinet so that a definite decision may be taken on the subject.

Yours, ——

This letter was the announcement that Bonar Law would resign unless the Cabinet rescinded its decision of the 4th November 1915. The great difficulty about this was that Lord Kitchener had already started, and at the meeting of 6th November the strongest advocates of evacuation blenched from the idea of reversing his mission

behind his back. Some public men had also other reasons for wishing him well away in the East, to which I shall refer when I come to deal with Lord Kitchener's relations with his colleagues. Bonar Law, therefore, utterly failed to find a single supporter for his plan for reversing the previous decision.

Nevertheless, he decided to persevere and to resign alone. The consequences of his resignation must have been the disruption of the Ministry, for Bonar Law was not simply an individual, but the leader of the strongest party in the House of Commons. Appeals and remonstrances couched in the friendliest terms were showered on him, especially by his Unionist friends and colleagues, but they did not shake his determination.

The opponents of evacuation certainly made a most strenuous fight. On the very night of his departure as an impartial commissioner to report to the Cabinet, Lord Kitchener put up a new scheme with the Admiralty for a purely naval attempt to seize the isthmus behind the Turkish armies at the neck of Bulair, and declared that he absolutely refused to sign orders for evacuation on the ground that it would lead to a terrible disaster. But the Navy fought shy of the scheme and Kitchener was obliged to modify his first declaration and to state that he did not see his way through the problem, and that it would be better to work out a scheme for getting the troops away, should this prove necessary.

Lord Kitchener then left for the East, where

he did not find the position in the least satisfactory. On visiting Egypt he discovered members of the Headquarters Staff comfortably installed in Cairo and the vicinity, and with no personal contact with the Palestine front against Turkey. He remarked to these officers in Egypt: "I thought you were here to protect the Canal. It seems to me that the Canal is protecting you."

After the Cabinet meeting of 6 November Bonar Law stood absolutely alone. Chamberlain, who agreed with him and who behaved with a most punctilious sense of honour, felt bound to take the ground that, having agreed to the departure of Lord Kitchener to report, he could not resign until that report had arrived. He did not think himself in the least likely to be convinced by any arguments which Lord Kitchener might advance against evacuation, but he would not pledge himself to resignation in advance of these arguments. November 7th therefore passed in interviews and perturbation. The disruption of the Government appeared imminent, for Bonar Law was oppressed with a sense of his public duty and could not be deflected an inch.

On that day Bonar Law had a meeting with Asquith—at the Prime Minister's request. Bonar Law made it clear that this conversation was a final one—and that either evacuation or his own resignation must follow at once. He amply atoned for any irresolution he had shown in his original attitude towards Lord Kitchener's mission. In the face of every persuasion employed by a veteran in the art he remained firm. At the

conclusion, the Prime Minister promised to support Bonar Law in his demand that the troops should be withdrawn forthwith. The crisis passed. Bonar Law did not resign; the troops were withdrawn from Gallipoli.

Probably no other man then in British politics could, after his original error in council in agreeing to the Kitchener mission, have pulled off such a stroke. It required a man not only of commanding titular position, but of unimpeachable moral character, combined with a reputation for meaning what he said. If any other Minister had threatened to resign under such circumstances the challenge would have resulted in the destruction of the Minister and not of the Ministry.

Even after 7 November the Die-hards continued to give trouble. But their cause was lost. Lord Kitchener's mission was now nothing but a journey to the spot for the purpose of arranging the method of evacuation.

On 15 November Lord Kitchener reported from the East. He was full of praise for what had been accomplished in the Dardanelles—there were many dangers in retirement—but the reason for retaining our forces there was no longer so strong as it had been—Egypt could be covered from another base—and careful and secret preparations for evacuation were being made, and this operation might be carried out with less loss than had been anticipated by himself. On 22 November he sent a message to say that German assistance to the Turks now made our position untenable. On 23 November the War Committee, which was the

old War Council and the old Dardanelles Committee, counselled retirement on the strength of Lord Kitchener's views.

Their decision was reported to the Cabinet. It was obvious that all was over, and that nothing now remained save to ratify evacuation. But Lord Curzon, with his well-known partiality for Die-hard causes, still struggled to delay the inevitable. He asked for time to draw up a document depicting the terrible consequences of retirement. And, indeed, he did succeed in producing a kind of film picture of the massacre of the rearguard boatloads retiring from the Dardanelles. Bonar Law replied to the film. He pointed out that the War Committee had reported for evacuation. If the advice of this Committee and Lord Kitchener and General Monro was to be disregarded under the circumstances, our method of carrying on the war was a farce. There were still other gyrations of the Die-hards, but they are not worth recording. Evacuation was inevitable, and took place with great success, and with none of the horrible consequences anticipated.

No estimate of the moral firmness displayed by Bonar Law throughout the Dardanelles crisis would be complete which did not picture the kind of arguments with which he had to contend. He was reminded that he knew nothing of war that expert after expert predicted a loss of thirty or forty per cent. of the troops as the price of evacuation; that he was setting his uninformed opinion against the best military minds, and that

the stake at issue was the lives of thousands of men. Horrible scenes of slaughter by the seashore were conjured up for his edification. Bonar Law was asked whether he would like to have this terrible burden on his conscience; and, so to speak, if he would be able to sleep at night with the curses of the dying in his ears.

Fortunately, or unfortunately, for him, he was not the sort of person to attract any theatrical expression of gratitude. He never turned from his course, and the consistent strength of his attitude saved many thousands of lives. He fought the Prime Minister, he fought the erratic genius of Churchill, he fought the immense prestige of Lord Kitchener, and he won. One Liberal colleague once let fall a remark which better than any other explains that victory. "Ah," he said, "Lloyd George is always threatening to resign, and we don't believe him. Bonar Law said he would resign, and we knew he would."

The prominent part played by Lord Curzon in the Dardanelles controversy on the opposite side was due entirely to his qualities in Council and not to his strength of character.

Lord Curzon occupied no very important position in the public eye at the outbreak of hostilities. The Tories regarded him as the man who had sold the pass over the Parliament Act. His day was generally regarded as over. But that was not his own view. From the very outset of the first Coalition Government he began to try to displace Bonar Law from the leadership of the Conservative party. He used perpetually a subtle

argument that the leadership of the Opposition had lapsed *de facto* with the accession of Conservative Ministers to the Government. Mr. Asquith, as Prime Minister, was their head—everybody else in the Government was on an equality. As Lord Lansdowne's influence began to wane that of Lord Curzon grew, and though Bonar Law's position was never in danger these covert attacks were none the less persisted in.

Lord Curzon held at one time in political circles a general brief to watch over the interests of the Air Force, for fear this Cinderella of the Services might be ground to pieces between the contending demands of the Army and Navy, to which its several sections were subordinate. So when the War Secretary or C.I.G.S. had told his colleagues the news from the Western Front, and the First Sea Lord had responded for the Navy, Lord Curzon would take up the tale for the Air Force. This gave him an opportunity for the exhibition of that pomposity which was his outstanding, but by no means his only, characteristic.

His rhetoric in making his statements was so lavish that sometimes it almost approached the ludicrous. " And now," he would say, " I must tell you about the bombing operations of the Air Force. There are two kinds of bombing operation. One is made by day, and one by night. The advantage of day bombing is that the object of attack is visible. The unfortunate disadvantage is that the assailant is also visible to the enemy. Now, on the other hand, in night bombing the precise reverse is the case. The object of attack is not visible to

the assailant, but, on the other hand, he cannot be seen by his opponents," etc., etc.

It is rather marvellous that his colleagues stood this kind of thing at all. Certainly he exercised over Mr. Asquith's mind an influence quite disproportionate to his real abilities, whereas the Prime Minister hopelessly underrated Bonar Law's talents and character from the start to finish of the first Coalition.

But apart from push and pomposity, Curzon had some other qualities which made it impossible to treat him simply as a political mediocrity and bore. He was a first-class dinner companion, and possessed of a shining wit. How the same man could be both a wit and a bore is hard to understand. In Curzon's case it simply was so—and this fact had a restraining effect on the adverse judgment of colleagues who were not inclined to like him.

On one occasion he gave a wonderful exhibition of his duality at a gathering in Paris under the third Coalition, and after the signing of the peace.

He had long been dinning into the ears of Ministers the necessity of keeping troops in Georgia and Azerbijan, and protecting the liberties of these infant republics. Some of his colleagues laughingly suggested that his interest was based on the fact that he knew where they were, and could pronounce the names correctly, whereas they could not—and that he was showing off his book knowledge and travel experience of the Middle East at their expense.

On this occasion he was particularly eloquent

in calling on his audience to save a people rightly struggling to be free, sacrificing their blood for their national ideals of centuries—small nations, indeed, but, above all, brave men.

Lord Birkenhead made a pointed attempt to check the flow and prick the bubble of rhetoric. He interjected: "Lord Curzon has laid great stress on the bravery of these peoples. Can he tell me the names of any battles the Georgians and Azerbijanians have ever won in history?"

There was a shout of laughter from the whole table. The barque of Curzon's eloquence seemed to have foundered. Curzon recovered instantly with a sharp rejoinder: "And can the Lord Chancellor tell us the names of any battles they have lost?"

It was Curzon's wit that won in the encounter. Of such a strange mixture was Curzon's character compounded.

So closed the Gallipoli episode—a strange picture of blood and mismanagement, glory and failure. There was one man who did not wait for the public news of the evacuation. Churchill had, on 15 November, anticipated the announcement, and on 18 November made his resignation speech to the House of Commons, left the Duchy of Lancaster, and retired to the command of a battalion in the trenches of France.

Cribb. Southsea.

Churchill "retired to the command of a Battalion in the trenches of France."

EARL OF BIRKENHEAD AND THE RT. HON. WINSTON CHURCHILL.

CHAPTER XIII

FIRST AND SECOND KITCHENER

AS the echoes of the conflict over the evacuation of the Dardanelles died away and the Government, by the mere process of time, began to find its legs, Ministers came to take first-hand stock of each other. Some strange developments then became apparent. There was a re-grouping of personalities largely independent of original party distinctions. Some of the Tories rallied round Mr. Asquith. The Prime Minister, indeed, seemed to make a particular appeal to the older and more feudal elements in Toryism as exemplified in Lord Lansdowne, Lord Curzon and Lord Long. Apart from this, many Liberal and Conservative Ministers found themselves quite adrift from old associations and entering into new friendships and alliances with men they had previously distrusted or detested.

Lord Kitchener was unquestionably the second figure in the Cabinet—so that the attitude of individuals towards him assumed immense importance. When the Conservatives first entered the Government they were willing to give him unquestioning support against any of his Liberal

critics. They regarded him as an appointment largely forced on the Premier by the Tory agitation of 1914. Not being as yet broken to the realities of war as seen from the inside, they imagined, no doubt, that their task would be to line up behind " a great soldier " against Liberal civilian criticism. This romantic view of the situation did not last long, chiefly because Lord Kitchener himself never encouraged it. On the contrary, his attitude and method was highly discouraging to any such conception. The Tories began to understand why some of the Liberals had failed to appreciate Lord Kitchener.

It must be remembered in fairness to all the people concerned that Lord Kitchener's presence in the Cabinet was in itself an amazing anomaly. No soldier, as a soldier, had ever sat in a Ministry since Monk and the Restoration, for Marlborough had been on the Council before he took a prominent part in a great war, and Wellington only after his soldiering days were finished. The source of such an anomaly in our political life requires explanation—just as do the somewhat unhappy consequences which flowed from it.

When Lord Kitchener was snatched off the Dover boat at the outbreak of hostilities and made Secretary of State for War, the appointment was made in deference both to the overwhelming pressure of public opinion and of the Press, and to the views of the Opposition. Mr. Asquith at that moment had just taken the seals of that office from the hands of General Seely, and Lord

Haldane was deputising there for the Prime Minister. It was clearly absurd and impossible that the Premier should be War Secretary in the face of a European war. On the other hand, neither the nation nor the Tories would have Lord Haldane there at any price. His reputation for a tenderness towards Germany was a fatal bar to his prospects.

What were the reasons for the appointment of the first great general since the Duke of Wellington to hold high civil office, and what was the nature of the man in whose favour this breach with ordinary tradition was made? The two questions are really indisseverable, for it was the personality of Lord Kitchener which gave him the immense prestige which compelled the Government to employ him at any cost. All this immense reputation was partly substance and partly that longer shadow which concrete objects cast in the rays of a setting sun. Lord Kitchener was a great and obscure figure. He had always been successful in everything which he had undertaken in distant lands.

The overthrow of the Khalifa, the final pacification of South Africa, the re-organisation of the Indian Army, the kindly and successful despotism he practised in Egypt, stood as bright and solid milestones marking the progress of his career. Other men have perhaps achieved as much without achieving adoration. But Lord Kitchener was the best advertised man in the Empire, because he refused to advertise; he had found a royal road by which the Press was

compelled to talk about him, if only in sheer annoyance at his silence. And something of the mystery and fatalism of the East was added to the hard practicality of his mind.

He was a stranger in England, and had the power and attraction of strangeness. On the Christmas Day of 1914 a visitor found him as usual during the war in his own large room at the War Office. Two huge fires blazed at either end, and the room was hot and sluggish. The newcomer commented on the appalling state of the atmosphere. "Very likely," said Kitchener, with a shiver. "I have not spent a Christmas in England for forty years." This touch of loneliness always struck the mind of the people, and also explains much in his Whitehall career. The low haze of the desert mist concealed his feet, and threw the rest of the figure up in huge proportions till it loomed gigantic above the mirage like a fabled and superhuman being in some Arabian tale.

The people did not reason about Kitchener, they just trusted, and that mere trust was a priceless asset in days when life was being torn up by the roots and the firmest mind might well fall into doubt or fear. Men simply said: "Kitchener is there; it is all right." The final proof of this contention is to be found in the myths which surrounded his death. In all the black ages of time men have looked for a deliverer, and when the deliverer has died with his work only half accomplished, his real death has always been denied, and his return confidently predicted.

The belief comes to us from behind the earliest dawn of history, and education has fortunately tried to kill these credulous hopes in vain. It is the last crown of popular worship, and when people said that Lord Kitchener was really a prisoner in Germany they ranked him with King Arthur and all the other heroes who come no more.

All this was the source of his strength, and of his appointment to office. He added to his prestige immensely by his prophecy of the scope and duration of the war. No other Secretary of State would have imagined it, and so no other would have prepared for it ; certainly no other man could have induced his colleagues to act on his conclusions or the public to accept them. A short war was in every one's mouth. But as events worked out at the outset along the lines he predicted—as the Germans failed to reach Paris, while the Russian steam-roller, instead of rushing upon Berlin at the speed of a motor-car, reeled back in confusion from Tannenberg, and the lines settled down in the west from the Alps to the sea, his outside reputation for prophecy rose to a towering height.

A subtle touch of the dramatic in the way in which he did business added to this impression, even in the inner circle of Government. In the first days of August the Government proposed to ask the House of Commons for power to increase the Army by 50,000 men. When the requisition came to the War Office Kitchener simply struck out the figure 50,000

and wrote in 300,000! And if his prestige in England was great, so was his position in Europe. The French and Russian Ambassadors, M. Cambon and Count Benckendorf, gave him their complete confidence and received his in return.

But when one has said this one has drawn the picture at its brightest; henceforward the lights begin to fade, and the rest is a melancholy story of the gradual whittling away of an immense reputation. From the very start the presence of Lord Kitchener produced a curious atmosphere in the Government. The wit who invented the tale that after a long exposition of the military position Kitchener leant back, lit a cigar, and remarked to the assembled Cabinet: "And now let's talk about the Welsh Church," did not get altogether away from the truth. Kitchener was frightened of the politicians, and ill at ease with nearly all of them. He had the soldier's professional and professed distrust of the class—and only Grey and Asquith surmounted the prejudice. Consider his career, his military upbringing, his prolonged absences from English life, the Oriental reticence in which he had dipped his mind. To him the men of law, of persuasion, of the energy of speech, were like some strange animals out of another world. Mr. Asquith seemed to understand him.*

Kitchener was a shy man, and though on some

*"Asquith had the confidence, even the attachment, of Kitchener in a way that no one else in the Cabinet had then." cf. "Twenty-five Years," by Viscount Grey of Fallodon," Vol. II., p. 241.

unbidden occasion sentences of great power and simplicity would rise suddenly to his lips in the intimacy of a private conversation, he added to the soldier's inability to explain that curse of nervousness which prevents a man speaking at the very moment when he should and must speak if he is to prevail in council. This failing produced by degrees a dismal impression. Lloyd George once said to me that Kitchener talked twaddle, and then, as though striving to be just, added: "No! He was like a great revolving lighthouse. Sometimes the beam of his mind used to shoot out, showing one Europe and the assembled armies in a vast and illimitable perspective, till one felt that one was looking along it into the heart of reality—and then the shutter would turn and for weeks there would be nothing but a blank darkness."

Shyness led to reticence, and the appearance of reserve injected a natural but unjustifiable irritation into the minds of colleagues. He was accused of secretiveness, sometimes with justice, sometimes only because he was suffering from a lack of the power of expression. When pressed for further explanations he would circulate extracts from telegrams—a proceeding which only increased mistrust. In a word, Ministers wanted to know what was going on in Lord Kitchener's mind—a thing he was unable or unwilling to explain to a crowded circle. By slow degrees their impression even of a lack of straightforwardness grew in strength, and one by one they began to drop away from his support.

All this might have mattered little if there had been no real ground for criticism. But, as the Dardanelles Commission reported: "Lord Kitchener did not sufficiently avail himself of the services of his general staff, with the result that more work was undertaken by him than was possible for one man to do, and confusion and want of efficiency resulted."

Consider the work of the War Office. First of all there was all the ordinary routine of that office in peace-time immensely augmented by the mere fact of war. Then there was the raising of the New Armies and the supply of vast additional quantities of military material. Finally, there was the supervision of the actual operations in the field. All these branches Kitchener attempted to take into his own hands, and he frequently issued personal instructions which were not known to the departmental chiefs.

His attitude towards the Imperial General Staff was particularly unfortunate, because that body had been robbed of nearly all its prominent members by the original Expeditionary Force and badly wanted nursing and encouragement. As it was, the late General Wolfe Murray simply became the War Secretary's technical adviser, with no independent power of initiative and judgment. Wolfe Murray failed because he was old, timid and ignorant of the changing conditions of warfare. Kitchener was always looking out for a successor to him and never making a selection. Nor was Wolfe Murray ever appointed permanently to the post of C.I.G.S.

This autocratic centralisation was not due to the

vanity of power. Kitchener was too sure of himself to be vain, and when subsequently he was convinced by argument that he was undertaking too much he submitted to the subdivision of his authority, first with Lloyd George on munitions and then with Robertson on strategy, with a good grace. It was simply that he had always done things in this single-handed way, and it did not occur to him to alter his habits. In Egypt it had been practicable; in India his special capacity for work made him seize for himself as Commander-in-Chief powers under the burden of which his successors broke down.

At the time of the change of Government in 1915 a proposal was made to transfer Lord Kitchener from the War Office and make him Commander-in-Chief—an office which has always possessed very vague powers. Some of the Tories were attracted by the idea, which they confused absurdly enough with a military dictatorship. On the other hand, Sir Austen Chamberlain raised a cry of alarm. Kitchener himself had often toyed with the idea, and used to discuss it with his friends up till the early months of 1915. But after the attacks of those months in the Press, which hurt his feelings bitterly, he never mentioned the subject again.

The Conservative members of the new Cabinet started, as I have mentioned, with a strong prejudice in Lord Kitchener's favour. But by the autumn of the year 1915 the confidence of many of them was heavily overclouded, if not absolutely destroyed.

The Dardanelles controversy explains a part of this feeling. There were other reasons. It is a hard saying, but it is one which must be accepted, that the only test of military advice in war is success or failure. The blood-stained failures of spring and summer began to soak into men's minds ; summer and early autumn brought only nibbling advances. And even when the New Army and adequate munitions were ready in the autumn, the first wild and brilliant rush at Loos was marred by faulty staff work, and the final failure to hold the objectives paid for with a fearful death-roll. In fact, the war was not going well, and Lord Kitchener and Lord French both suffered a diminution of authority in consequence.

At the War Office, however, Kitchener's power from start to finish never suffered any variation or shadow of turning. Nor was this due to fear of an unpopular chief. Lord Kitchener there was not the sort of bogey, now brooding in some inner apartment, now sallying out to harass the staff, which has sometimes been depicted. There punctually every morning at nine o'clock, and seldom even going out for lunch, he was assiduous, but also accessible—to the kind of people he wanted. Civilians he would not see, nor fussy old generals, but the active and rising young officers of any rank could always gain admittance. Sometimes he spent, or possibly wasted, whole days in these kinds of talks, for he was, beyond anything else, the champion of the rank and file and of the young officers—of the men who do the rough work.

Of course, he had his favourites, chiefly those who had served under him with success in his early wars. After all, it was equally said of Napoleon, "No one had a chance of his baton who had not been with him in Egypt." The soldier who had the greatest influence with him in England was undoubtedly the late General Sir John Cowans, the Quarter-master-general, whose advice he almost invariably took.

And if he had his favourites, he also had his bugbears—one of them the unfortunate official who had to sign all War Office letters for which he was not really responsible. "That man ——," Kitchener used to say, "will sign anything." But he was by no means the "terror" portrayed in the popular Press. In great things he cultivated patience almost as a fetish; in small things not infrequently he betrayed a sudden irritation. Once it was pointed out to him that he had rebuked a junior officer unjustly. "No matter," said Kitchener, after reflection, "that fellow has an obstinate face."

On one occasion at least he found himself passionately engaged in a controversy which one would have imagined was foreign to his interest. The High Church party discovered that the Principal Chaplain at the front was a Presbyterian, and that Anglican priests were in military subordination to a Nonconformist.

Lord Kitchener took up with zeal this injustice to the orthodox Church. He called Bishop Gwynne, of Khartoum, to the rescue, cut the

Episcopalians out from under the guns of the Presbyterian, put them under the bishop, and made him a major-general. The Presbyterian minister was only a colonel, and Kitchener was forcibly appealed to to redress the balance and make him a general too. "I will make him a general," replied Kitchener with real anger, "when you make him a bishop." But this, surely, was an eccentricity of genius.* He stood the greatest test of character in that he was worshipped by his entourage, and repaid their devotion in kind. Colonel Fitzgerald, who died with him, knew him better than any man, and was that kind of invaluable aide who will on occasion stand up to his chief in argument, adored him. When the news of Hubert Hamilton's death was burst on him by surprise Kitchener broke down and wept.

What Lord Kitchener had needed all along was someone in the Cabinet who could gain his confidence and put his ideas in a coherent and argumentative form. At one time he seemed to lean on Mr. Asquith, but the Prime Minister somehow did not fill this role.

Lord Birkenhead formed a friendship with Lord Kitchener, and undoubtedly aspired to be his interpreter to the Cabinet. He would have been ready to supply the fluent words for the War Minister's somewhat obscure cogitations and incoherent utterance. To a trifling extent he did this—but the main plan failed of accom-

*When Mr. Lloyd George became War Secretary the Presbyterian Chief Chaplain became a major-general. Mr. Lloyd George never was open to the influence of the Episcopalians.

plishment. Why it was never carried through would be hard to say. Perhaps Lord Kitchener looked on Lord Birkenhead as a politician pure and simple. The more probable explanation is that the soldier had given his whole confidence to Mr. Asquith, and did not desire any other mediator in the Cabinet.*

Considering the great position Birkenhead has occupied in the public estimation, it is necessary to try and explain the way in which the light of his genius was obscured during the war period. This was certainly not due to any lack of judgment on his part on military matters. On the contrary, he was generally clear and wise in counsel.

In the first place, his immediate power was occluded. He had been the democratic orator-in-chief of the Tory party. Whenever he came to speak vast crowds assembled to listen to him. But democratic oratory came to an end with the outbreak of hostilities. It could only be employed for the purpose of recruiting, and here Bottomley could beat Birkenhead every time.

With this reputation behind him Lord Birkenhead's opinions were not always listened to with the attention which the soundness of his views ought to have commanded. It was not until the time of Lloyd George's later Premiership that his essential wisdom in counsel was recognised.

As it was, in 1914 and 1915 the war atmosphere was unsuited to him. He had no place anywhere.

*None the less Kitchener had a great personal regard for Lord Birkenhead. Sir George Arthur in his life of Kitchener relates that more than once Kitchener said " F. E. has been a comfort in Cabinet to-day."

The Press Bureau was a dangerous and thankless job. When Birkenhead went out to G.H.Q. in France he appeared as a major without any knowledge of a major's work.

In technical experience of war he was a lieutenant in the Oxfordshire Yeomanry. None the less, he was a Privy Councillor and a national personality. He could not be given the command of a regiment and he could hardly revert to his original rank. Birkenhead never understood the military view of his position. The result was a series of misunderstandings for which I blame the generals concerned far more than I blame him. There was a complete confusion of values. On one occasion General Seely, then in command of a brigade, went to the late Lord French, as Commander-in-Chief, and asked for permission to visit the King of the Belgians with Birkenhead as his companion.

The Commander-in-Chief asked for an explanation for the request. General Seely said that they had a private message for the King of the Belgians from Lord Kitchener. This infuriated Lord French, who declared that all representations from the Government at home to the officers commanding the Allied armies in the field must be made through him. The backwash of his annoyance was vented on Lord Birkenhead, who had in reality very little to do with the matter.

Lord Birkenhead's views on the war were, in the main, extraordinarily sound. He was neither enthusiastic about new ideas, nor unduly

suspicious of them—but he could not understand generals.

His valuation of his own services and prospects always varied greatly. When I first knew him before the war, his desire was to be the equivalent of Lord Randolph Churchill—the Tory Democrat, who would yet beat the Old Gang. After that his aspirations soared higher—and he would talk about Lord Palmerston as an enviable personality.

But in the interval of the war there was a distinct slump in the height of Birkenhead's ambitions. Afterwards, when post-war events gave a favourable chance for his vast abilities, he began to talk of Disraeli—long before Mr. Baldwin had made a habit of mentioning the late Earl of Beaconsfield with respect.

Lord Birkenhead's chief enemy has always been his own biting and witty tongue, which spares no man. He often gives offence in this respect to people whom he really loves and admires. G.H.Q. in France was about the worst place in the world in which to employ this particular instrument.

I remember myself making what I considered a few harmless jests there—and being astonished at their reception. A major-general became as violent in his fury as though I had been laughing at a funeral. But as a rule I avoided the military hierarchy.

Birkenhead did not—and was inclined to talk at St. Omer as if he were at the Carlton Club.

There still lingers in Pall Mall the story of Birkenhead's dealing with the well-known shipping magnate of Liverpool, the late Mr.

Welsford, who rather astonished everybody by leaving a million pounds behind him. Welsford was a good-hearted individual, but rather fond of talking and boasting. He became, in fact, the club bore.

Birkenhead came to loggerheads with him as a partner over the bridge table. "Do you know who is the most unpopular member of this club?" "I suppose," replied Welsford, "that you mean me." "No, I don't," said Birkenhead. A silence followed. "Do you know who is the most unpopular member of this club?" repeated Birkenhead. There was no answer. "Well, I am, because I proposed you for membership."

Such methods of conversation did not endear Lord Birkenhead to the military. When Birkenhead came home he met some lady who professed to have an intimate acquaintance with General Tom Bridges,* then attached as liaison officer to the staff of the King of the Belgians. "Tom Bridges," said the lady, "can make the Belgians do anything he likes." "Really, can he?" replied Birkenhead. "Of course he can," said the lady. "Could he make them fight?" "Of course he could." "Then," said Lord Birkenhead, "why doesn't he?" From a mere major this was blasphemy. This style of wit did Birkenhead an incalculable amount of damage before he had reached an assured position in the political world. Afterwards it mattered far less to his prospects,

*Lieut.-Gen. Sir George Bridges, K.C.M.G., K.C.B., made Governor of South Australia in 1922.

for he had acquired a prescriptive right to a certain amount of latitude.

But the soldiers treated Birkenhead very foolishly in not making any adequate use of his talents. He has got the best brains of any man among my contemporaries. If all his other qualities matched his intellect he would be the biggest world figure of our time.

CHAPTER XIV

FIRST AND SECOND KITCHENER
(continued)

THE last chapter has been a melancholy story of the decay of the great military reputation of Lord Kitchener in the eyes of an inner ring of colleagues while its lustre still remained undimmed in the eyes of the nation. Conservatives had followed Liberals into the camp of doubt.

But all this time the decay of real power and influence went on. By the early autumn of 1915 Lloyd George and Bonar Law, the two most powerful men in the Ministry, had both, working from different ends, arrived at a state of profound dissatisfaction with the military administration at the War Office, and were considering together the advisability of informing the Prime Minister that unless an improvement took place a change would have to be made. Action was not long delayed.

Already by September Lloyd George was beginning to manifest signs of impatience with the general conduct of the new Government and a distrust of the personnel, methods, and machinery by which it was being carried on. With that kind

of uncanny insight into the heart of the future which marks his daring, erratic, and yet practical mind, he had seized on three main improvements which must be carried into effect—conscription, a small War Cabinet, and the removal of Lord Kitchener from the War Office.

Of these three things, one came by agreement, one by a death, and the third by the fall of a Government. Bonar Law marked his uneasiness, and told Lloyd George that he was on the verge of falling out with Mr. Asquith—a *dénouement* which would be disastrous to both men and a calamity to the country. He offered to go to Mr. Asquith and persuade him to do something to meet Lloyd George's views, adding with considerable humour, " I only want to see you two on the same good terms you were when you combined to do me out of the Chancellorship of the Exchequer in May." But we are only concerned with these matters here in so far as they affected Lord Kitchener.

Mr. Asquith was in a position of great difficulty. He did not really need pressing by his two principal lieutenants at all. He himself was firmly of opinion that there ought to be a change at the War Office, and agreed with them that Lord Kitchener's habit of acquiring all the military information and keeping it to himself often made it quite impossible for the Government to come to any decision at all—except one gained by leaping blindly in the dark. But the Prime Minister could not, and did not, disguise from himself the fact that Lord Kitchener's immense prestige made it

impossible for the Government to dismiss him without a popular upheaval he was not yet prepared to face.

In addition, he was not greatly impressed with the idea, then put forward, of Lloyd George as the new War Secretary, on the ground that his administrative record was a poor one. So his attempt to remove Kitchener came to nothing.

However, a strange missive remains as a memento of the movement—so vigorously initiated and executed with such a lack of determination and energy.

It is a copy of a letter written by Bonar Law to Lloyd George. It is undated, and is in Bonar Law's own handwriting. The copy is transcribed on Colonial Office note paper, and bears the following endorsement:

"Written from recollection after letter was sent."

My dear L.G.,

Have you any objection to my telling the P. M. that you had said to me that in your opinion as long as Lord K. was at the W. O. nothing but disaster was in front of us, that you had told me that you had written to the P. M. that you could not continue to share responsibility if conditions at the W. O. were unchanged and that I had replied that if this question were raised as a clear issue I should be compelled to take the same course.

Yours, ——

But nothing could keep Lloyd George and Bonar Law long apart on the question of War Office administration, because it was always a question on which from start to finish they were in essence absolutely agreed. And then there was the Dardanelles controversy, ever growing fiercer and fiercer as the weeks of October 1915 slipped by, to keep the differences between Kitchener on one side and Bonar Law and Lloyd George on the other alight and glowing. The opposition to Kitchener said that he went to the War Office so early and worked so hard there that by the time the evening came he was quite unfit to discuss anything, while the " Evacuationists " resented a statement of the War Secretary, probably made in the heat of the moment, that it would be better for our prestige to lose the Gallipoli army than to withdraw it.

In the first week of November, as we have seen, the crisis over the Dardanelles became acute, and Lord Kitchener's whole position, bound up as it was with the refusal to evacuate, tottered. A day or two before General Monro's report was considered by the Government Lloyd George and Bonar Law renewed their demands for Kitchener's resignation, but in far more stringent terms. By this time Mr. Asquith, who cordially agreed with them that Kitchener must go, had so far nerved himself against popular opinion as to be ready to act.

But the method by which he sought to effect the common purpose was indirect. He did not dismiss the War Secretary; he sent him to

the East and became Acting Secretary in Whitehall.*

In describing Lord Kitchener's part in the Dardanelles adventure I have pointed out the curious circumstances which surrounded his departure for the Mediterranean. Why was he sent to the East, an advocate of keeping the troops in Gallipoli, to report on the question of retirement, and the policy of evacuation decided on in Bonar Law's favour almost as soon as his back was turned and before he had time to report? The answer is that Mr. Asquith was trying to kill two birds with one stone. By sending out Lord Kitchener to report he postponed the disruption of the Government and he also got away from England a War Secretary whom he was determined to dismiss without scandal if he possibly could.

*Lord Kitchener's biographer tells us that the War Secretary was under no illusion as to the underlying motive of the mission assigned him. "Candid friends had hinted to him that some of his Ministerial colleagues would be content to see his chair empty or otherwise filled, and would rejoice in any incident—or accident—which might prolong or perpetuate his absence. "Perhaps if I have to lose a lot of men over there, I shall not want to come back," was his remark, when the Cabinet approved a mission fraught with grave responsibility and capable of indefinite extension. On the morrow of Kitchener's departure the air was thick with rumours of his supersession."—cf. "Life of Lord Kitchener," by Sir George Arthur, Vol. III., p. 185.

†"At this meeting the desire of certain Ministers to effect Lord Kitchener's removal from the War Office was very prominent. When he left for the Dardanelles they had hoped that some pretext could afterwards be found for keeping him away from London permanently, and when his mission was terminated by the decision to evacuate, the question of delaying his return to England was raised at once. The first proposal made was that he should be asked to remain in the East so as to exercise a general supervision

Mr. Asquith never intended that Lord Kitchener should return to Whitehall; on the contrary, he proposed to make him Viceroy of the East, with full command of all our Expeditionary Forces in the Mediterranean and in Asia. "Malbrouk has gone to the war," said a witty Liberal member of the Ministry. "Who knows when he will return?" Kitchener himself had some suspicion of the plan, but he believed quite erroneously that the seals of office could not be transferred in his absence. But, in fact, by this time he was altogether out of favour. He passed through Paris on his way out, and had an interview with Joffre at Chantilly.

Field-Marshal Sir Henry Wilson—that shrewd

over the evacuation, and my opinion was taken as to the desirability of that step. There was only one answer. The operation—an extremely difficult one—must be under the direction of one authority only, otherwise nobody would know who was responsible for anything. If Lord Kitchener was to remain, then he must be appointed Commander-in-Chief in place of General Monro. If not so appointed, then the farther he was away from the Dardanelles the better, so that there might be no misunderstanding as to who was in charge. But the Government could not well order him, a Field-Marshal, to take the place of Monro, a Lieutenant-General, and therefore another expedient had to be found. After several unsuccessful attempts to evolve one, it was suggested that he should be asked to go as a temporary measure to Egypt, where his presence would be valuable when the moral effect of the evacuation was being felt. This suggestion, put forward by a Minister who shall be nameless, was warmly welcomed, and was conveyed to Lord Kitchener at the same time as he was informed that evacuation had been provisionally approved, and that (following the advice I had given) the method of carrying it out "must be left, of course, to the judgment of the commander on the spot." Lord Kitchener replied that he ought to be "back in England, as time is passing, and I can do no good here. I have arranged with McMahon (the High Commissioner) to quiet the effect in Egypt as far as possible." —cf. "Soldiers and Statesmen, 1914-1918," by Field-Marshal Sir William Robertson, Bart., Vol. I., pp. 140, 141.

hand in all such matters, a schemer and intriguer both, who possessed throughout the war an importance quite disproportionate to his military status because he was endued with the political mind, and could and did talk the language of the politicians—was quick to note the altered values. He indicated both Joffre and Kitchener as still the strong men of each nation to the popular gaze, but both in reality under the shadow of displacement. The Field-Marshal must have had a special interest in Lord Kitchener because both dealt in military prophecy.

But while Kitchener was at least right in 1914, Sir Henry Wilson's abundant and portentous prophecies were mostly disproved as soon as uttered.

At the very moment when he was writing these reflections on Joffre and Kitchener he declared: "We have no longer anything to fear either in the West or in the East from the enemies' armies. On the contrary, it is they who have cause for anxiety in the future."

In fact, the frequency with which the predictions of the military failed in any way to correspond with the event was as much a source of embarrassment to the Government as the dogmatic tone in which they were uttered was a cause of irritation to its members. To-day in the ranks of the Higher Command there is only one kind of prophet left—the man who puts nothing in writing. But this is by the way.

Mr. Asquith then was Acting War Secretary while Lord Kitchener was in the Mediterranean,

but it had been clear even before Lord Kitchener's departure that some permanent new appointment had to be made. Lloyd George was not anxious to succeed to the War Office, though he was ready in the ultimate resort to assume a responsibility which he felt to be mainly his. He must have perceived, however, that any politician succeeding Lord Kitchener must be suspect in the popular judgment, and that this kind of suspicion would greatly limit his usefulness as War Minister. Suddenly Mr. Asquith announced that he was ready to assume the post in permanency himself, and at first he persuaded Bonar Law to his view. Lloyd George would not agree.

On reflection, however, Bonar Law decided that it was impossible for one man to be at once Premier and War Secretary, and he wrote Mr. Asquith a formal protest. Immediately after this Lloyd George in his turn changed his mind and agreed to Asquith facing as War Secretary the first blast of the storm which was certain to follow the eminent soldier's resignation. Bonar Law thought this change of front an instance of Lloyd George's instability, but the historian might say that no one concerned showed any marked consistency of opinion. What the upshot would have been it is impossible to say, for no new appointment was made.

The whole scheme for removing Lord Kitchener came to nothing. It was apparently upset by one of those lesser accidents which rule the destinies of nations. The story came to the late Charles Palmer, afterwards a member of the House of

Commons, then editor of the "Globe" newspaper, in that somewhat perverted form which news passed through several intermediaries often assumes. The "Globe" promptly announced on 6 November—that is, after Lord Kitchener had started for the East—that there was serious trouble between Lord Kitchener and the Cabinet, and that the former had tendered his resignation. Instantly Lord Birkenhead, as Attorney-General, and Sir John Simon, as Home Secretary, brought the heavy artillery of Dora into action, and the "Globe" was suppressed. But when the errant newspaper was closed down the plan to change War Secretaries was closed down with it. The Government did not lose the services of Lord Kitchener, though it wanted to; but the "Globe" did lose the services of Mr. Palmer, though it did not want to.

It is amusing to reflect that the action taken was tantamount to an admission by the Government that the statement that there was a disagreement between the Cabinet and Lord Kitchener, culminating in the latter's resignation, was likely to cause "disaffection." The newspaper was permitted to publish again in a fortnight's time on confessing that it accepted the Government's assurance that Lord Kitchener had not tendered his resignation—which was the truth—and also "that there were no grounds of dissension between Lord Kitchener and his colleagues such as to affect their future Ministerial co-operation," which was truth of a highly technical variety.

Lord Kitchener therefore returned to Whitehall.

But he himself was aware that his real reign was over, and he pointed to Lloyd George as the prime mover in producing this new situation. Two aspects of his decline became apparent in two simultaneous series of developments. In the first place there was Lord Kitchener's inclination to retire of his own volition, and in the second place there came the proposal to divide the functions of the War Office, and to set up the old division which subsisted (until Lord Palmerston abolished it during the Crimean war) of a Secretary at War and a Secretary of War. If it will be remembered that these two moves were really going on together, it will be possible to describe them one by one.

In the second week of December Lord Kitchener intimated to the Prime Minister that he was aware that he had lost the confidence of the Cabinet, and that he wished to retire and take over the command in Egypt. The Premier was, of course, agreeable to this course, but—who was to succeed ? His own succession had been ruled out ; we have seen that Lloyd George was unwilling to be the new Secretary of State, and time and reflection seemed to have stiffened him to a definite refusal. Bonar Law, for one reason or another, was not offered the post, and when the Prime Minister wished to appoint Austen Chamberlain this course, too, was objected to. The truth of the matter appears to be that the shadow of the forthcoming Kitchener-Robertson agreement, which would devitalise the powers of the new civilian Secretary, hung heavily over the

whole transaction, and robbed the office of its attractions.

Finally, as no successor could be found, Lord Kitchener consented to remain; but he did so at the price of submitting to a further truncation of his powers.

Up till 1855 the Secretary at War discharged what might roughly be described as the administration of the War Office in times of peace. On the outbreak of hostilities, however, the Colonial Secretary suddenly became the Minister of War, and took over the responsibility for active operations. It was now proposed to revert to something analogous to this system by making the Chief of the Imperial Staff a kind of Minister of War responsible for strategy and the conduct of the armies in the field. The C.I.G.S. would thus cease to be the mere echo of the Secretary of War, and would become a real power and personage. Field-Marshal Robertson was the man indicated for the new appointment.

Something had happened in France which made Field-Marshal Robertson available for this post. Lord French had been recalled. Lord Kitchener had very little to do with this action. The question was on what terms would Field-Marshal Robertson come. Kitchener saw him in Paris after he came back from the East, and, indeed, they travelled together. In the course of the journey the two men got to understand one another, and cordial personal relations, never broken, were established between them.

The powers it was now proposed to give the

C.I.G.S. were in all conscience sufficiently extended. As has been suggested, the duties of the War Office were to be cut in half, and in reality two Secretaries of State appointed. One, Lord Kitchener, with the nominal leadership, was to discharge all those duties which would appertain to the Secretary of State in time of peace, the other, Field-Marshal Robertson, was to conduct the war. So long as these two co-equal monarchs agreed together in general policy and in respecting each other's boundaries, such a system might possibly work for a time, as, indeed, it did with Robertson and Kitchener. Robertson, indeed, absolutely played the game by his official superior but real colleague; he behaved to him as if he acknowledged his subordination, and all friction was avoided. None the less, before he accepted the post of C.I.G.S. he had demanded and obtained direct access to the Cabinet. This privilege made his position practically co-equal with his colleague and far superior to the position of the First Sea Lord towards the First Lord of the Admiralty.

But the system of the Kitchener-Robertson agreement was a fundamentally wrong one, as Lloyd George discovered to his cost when he succeeded Kitchener a few months afterwards; and it required a convulsion which destroyed a Government to rectify the blunder. Lloyd George, indeed, threw down the Government to do this—became Prime Minister—and promptly appointed Lord Derby Secretary of State under precisely the same vicious conditions.

Lord Kitchener, therefore, returned from Paris to find himself only in control of one of three branches of work with which he had started. Munitions and strategy had gone; there only remained recruiting and the administration of the War Office. Here he continued all-powerful until the end.

These last days were not without one touch of glory. At the invitation of the late Neil Primrose and Sir Henry Dalziel, he agreed to meet the members of the House of Commons face to face and brave the politicians in their very lair. The dissatisfaction of the inner ring had spread outwards, and he was doubted at Westminster. The meeting was a triumphant success, and Kitchener basked in a kind of Indian summer of a spontaneous popularity in the House. But what the outer ring thought about the soldier could not affect the opinions of the Cabinet.

I have said that this is a story of diminishing lights, and now nearly all the candles but one—that of life itself—are out. Even Kitchener's great popularity had not survived altogether intact the hard and disastrous year of 1915. Neuve Chapelle, Loos, the Dardanelles were not names of good omen; and the strain of war was beginning to tell. In the early days the crowds had come down in the morning to see him enter the War Office; they came no longer. Partly, no doubt, his manner discouraged these demonstrations; he did not seem to care whether people gazed at him or not—hardly indeed to be aware of their presence; unlike Lloyd George, who bor-

"And now nearly all the candles but one
—that of life itself—are out."

KITCHENER LEAVING THE WAR OFFICE.

rowed an open car to drive from Downing-street to the Mansion House because he could not be seen in a closed one ! So the crowds, too, fell away as the Cabinet Ministers had done.

To him the Russian Mission was a disguised banishment—for he knew that from it he would never return to Whitehall. He did not conceal from himself that the sun of his military activities was setting, although he could not foresee with what suddenness it would be plunged into darkness.

So on a day in June, unnoticed, uncheered, almost unattended, the greatest living soldier of the Empire, a man who had become even in his lifetime a legend both to East and West, drove down to King's Cross. He arrived a minute and a half before the train was due to depart, and on the platform Kitchener had one of his curious and sudden gusts of impatient irritation over the delay. Then the engine pulled out, and the train, with its load of human greatness, vanished into the night.

CHAPTER XV

THE LAST PHASE

IT will be observed that nothing has been said on the question of compulsory military service, which, with the advent of 1916, became at last a living issue. I do not propose to discuss the history of the question in detail. The advocates of compulsion have been shown definitely by the logic of fact to be right and its opponents wrong. No one believes to-day that we could have won the war on a voluntary basis. But nearly all the politicians held such transient views on the advisability of applying compulsion at any given moment that they could adduce evidence to show that they were in favour of it at one time or another. To trace all the ramifications of their beliefs would be tedious in the last degree.

Three outstanding facts may be noted:

(1) The Tories declared themselves theoretically for compulsion before they joined the first Coalition Ministry in May 1915, but did little to effect it in office.

(2) Mr. Lloyd George, a Radical, was from start to finish the leader of the compulsionist movement.

(3) Everybody up to the summer of 1915 tended to rely on Lord Kitchener to give a sign

—and Lord Kitchener seemed to be waiting on the Prime Minister to tell him whether to give a sign or not. So nothing happened.

Further, there were always three divisions in current opinion—though men passed backwards and forwards between them with bewildering rapidity. There were the people who were for conscription, whether the country wanted it or not; there were the people who were for it if the country would agree; and there were the people who were against it anyhow.

The middle section really had the most wisdom. They wanted to prove to the people that compulsory military service was the only possible course, and they had to show voluntaryism was breaking down before they could do so. The Die-hard compulsionists replied that this was a dangerous and wasteful process because the voluntary system put men into wrong places and killed off the best ones first. This, they contended, was a waste of national energy. The answer was that a great reaction against the war, due to a premature application of conscription, would waste more energy still.

The Derby scheme was the test. As soon as its failure was manifest to the country the Military Service Act was passed and accepted by public opinion. The proof that it was not a burning political issue is contained in the fact that only one Under-Secretary resigned because compulsion was not carried, and only one Minister resigned because it was.

Otherwise the internal politics of the greater

part of the year 1916 were, from the public point of view, singularly devoid of interest.

In France there was the lull which marked the preparation for the Somme offensive. The first great event was the tragic death of Lord Kitchener in June 1916. The War Office thus became vacant without any of the disabilities which had so far clung to the succession. The struggle over the vacancy is of great importance because it led directly to events of a far more serious character. The question at issue was simply this : Was the new War Secretary to be one of the strongest men in the Government or was he to be a Minister of the second magnitude in the political constellation ?

There were several people who for varying reasons held very much the same view on this matter—the soldiers holding higher commands at the War Office and the Prime Minister ; both were against Lloyd George.

Field-Marshal Robertson's position as the *de facto* leader of the soldiers' party was perfectly intelligible. It has been pointed out how strange a division of power had been created at the War Office under the Kitchener-Robertson agreement. It was clear that if the Chief of the Imperial Staff secured an agreeable civilian head as colleague he would be Secretary of War in all but name. If, on the other hand, Lloyd George was appointed, everyone might look out for squalls. Several soldiers were at that time taking a considerable part in what may be roughly described as war politics, and believed themselves to be,

or were at least told by others that they were, the new strong silent men, the latest heaven-sent saviours of their country in the long succession of those soldier-statesmen.

The soldiers, therefore, put in a nomination which they thought would meet their requirements. But the whole idea on which they acted was absurd, and they vastly overrated their influence as political strategists in these, to them, new-trodden realms, unless—and it is a very big "unless"—they knew that they had the Prime Minister behind them. It must be clear that in the normal course of events the great position of War Secretary, which still retained its prestige in name, if not in fact, would not be allowed to fall to any but one of the most powerful members of the Cabinet. The war was going badly, and the public would be likely to be dissatisfied with the nomination of a mere figurehead to Whitehall.

Yet when it was suggested to the soldiers that either Bonar Law or Lloyd George was certain to go to the War Office, and that as they would probably find the former easier to get on with, they had better make a virtue of necessity and ask for him, they would not take the advice, but clung to the idea of a smaller man, and so rushed finally on their fate.

Now, the Prime Minister did not want Lloyd George there either, and it seems probable therefore that the soldier-statesmen were at least strengthened in their attitude by the knowledge of this fact. They were, they said, keenly anxious to

avoid uninstructed or over-zealous civilian interference, particularly in the direction of the Quartermaster's and Adjutant's departments. What was the inner motive for the Premier's attitude ? In the course of this book it will be necessary to consider Mr. Asquith's character and record as a Minister in time of war, for, with the struggle over this appointment, another shadow of impending doom began to fall across his path. For the moment all that need be said is this : he never trusted Lloyd George, and therefore didn't like him. Mr. Asquith's distrust may have been due to political events of the past, or it may have been due to some accident of temperament. We do not, after all, trust or distrust men by logic.

But in describing the continual contests with his colleagues in which Lloyd George was involved, and the distrust and even animosity which he succeeded in arousing, first in the breast of many of his old Liberal colleagues, and then of his new Tory ones, we cannot help feeling that there is an aspect of his character which has not been squarely faced. Why did these perpetual stirrings of combat and distrust charge the whole atmosphere in which he moved ?

The answer might partly be found in his own rapid march from the pacifist wing of Liberalism to the left of extreme militancy. And in the original Asquith Government this explanation might account for the facts. Thus he began in 1914 at cross-purposes with Churchill because the latter was the head of the fighting school, and he finished the year by alienating the more

old-fashioned Liberals as a result of the vigorous war measures he proposed.

But if this is the true and sole explanation of the troubles which beset him, why was it that he started with the confidence of his Tory colleagues in the May of 1915 and had largely lost it by the end of the year? Why did Bonar Law say, "When we joined the Cabinet there was no man we disliked more than McKenna and no man we trusted more than Lloyd George. Now the case is precisely reversed"? Surely Lloyd George did not alienate Tory sentiment because he was in favour of a vigorous prosecution of the war. The explanation will not hold water, and we must probe still deeper into the events and discover what common view united so many diverse political elements in opposition to Lloyd George within the Cabinet.

If you could cross-examine all those who were at one time or another hostile witnesses, their complaints would probably resolve themselves into one single set of ideas—that Lloyd George always had too ready and too complete answers to every possible objection which might be brought against his conduct, as though he had considered in advance that his actions might lay him open to charges of selfishness or insincerity; that he was, in fact, always thinking far too much of himself and far too little of the team; that a brilliant stroke for himself outweighed in his eyes lack of smooth running in the Government machine; that he was, in a word, always "on the make."

There is no question but that this view was held by a large number of independent colleagues who had little in common among themselves. This mere fact does not, of course, prove that this interpretation of Lloyd George is the correct one. But the observer must note one tremendous piece of corroborative evidence. What caste Lloyd George had lost with many Ministers while he was only one among equals he regained almost at a stroke the instant he became Prime Minister. In a word, his team play became perfect the moment he was made captain, and the original source of every disturbance, the target of every mistrust, became a unifying influence in the Cabinet and an object of unbounded confidence. From this fact history must draw its own conclusion.

In any case, Mr. Asquith was firmly determined not to exalt Lloyd George's fortune further by granting him his ambition to go to Whitehall, and his mind turned in the alternative direction either of a weak man or a satellite. It is fair to say, however, that Mr. Asquith fully realised the strained feelings existing between Lloyd George and the Generals, and honestly feared that serious friction would follow on Lloyd George's appointment.

It has been pointed out already that Lloyd George and Bonar Law had in the past acted in concert on War Office questions. They were of the same mind now ; they did not think that the War Office should fall to one of the lesser lights, and so the position practically lay between the

two of them. Lloyd George was anxious, Bonar Law was willing, to take it. If the latter had been strongly pressed by the Prime Minister at that time to take the vacant post things might have turned out very differently, but he was not so pressed.

There can, however, be no suspicion of an intrigue against the Prime Minister, for at this time Bonar Law and Asquith were working in the closest harmony, while Bonar Law's attitude to Lloyd George was distinctly cold. It cannot be stated too plainly or emphatically that here, and in practically every matter in the period under review, if Bonar Law's judgment was with Lloyd George, his general sympathy was with Asquith, and that it was always with the greatest reluctance that he opposed the Prime Minister's views. Lloyd George and Bonar Law simply happened to agree on the facts of the War Office situation. The truth of the matter is that to any rational judgment Lloyd George was the obvious man to succeed Lord Kitchener.

When matters stood in this posture a meeting took place between the Minister of Munitions and the Colonial Secretary at my house at Leatherhead to discuss what action should be taken. The day was Sunday, and Bonar Law was to go to France next morning.

The two Ministers arrived quite early. The conversation between them began extraordinarily badly, as is often the case between two public men who are not on close terms of friendship with one another. Bonar Law stated his com-

plaints against Lloyd George as a colleague quite frankly. In effect he recapitulated the Asquith case against the Minister of Munitions.

Lloyd George met, or rather avoided, these accusations, with great tact. He did not attempt a rebuttal of the charges. He treated the past as something not worth discussing. There was only one question that mattered, he said, and that was how to deal with the vacancy at the War Office. Either a satellite of Asquith or a weak man agreeable to the soldiers would be appointed, or the War Office must fall to one of the strong men of the Government. This, he thought, limited the choice to Bonar Law and himself. Since a weak appointment would be fatal to the conduct of the war, he offered to give Bonar Law his unqualified support for the post.

Yet even to this gesture Bonar Law did not respond very readily. It was only in the afternoon that the two men seemed to get into real touch with one another. Then, after a prolonged discussion, Bonar Law promised to back Lloyd George's claim to the War Office.

I had arranged to travel to France with Bonar Law next morning, but all plans had to be changed in order to carry out the new decision. Otherwise the War Office appointment might be made before Bonar Law and Lloyd George could bring their joint influence to bear. Bonar Law therefore determined to motor straight down to Sutton Courtney, the Premier's Berkshire residence, and bring him to book on the War Office

issue. He was very humanly annoyed by the fact that he had previously tried to arrange a meeting with Asquith in London and had been told that if he wished to see the Premier he must follow him into the country.

I went with him, and sat in the car outside while he went into the house. No sooner had Bonar Law informed Asquith of the War Office discussion with Lloyd George than the Prime Minister said, "I offer it to you." Bonar Law replied that it was too late. Last week, he said, if he had been pressed he would have taken it. Now he was pledged to support Lloyd George. Furthermore, he had come to the conclusion on reflection that Lloyd George was the best appointment and must have the post. Asquith then agreed to make Lloyd George War Secretary.

Bonar Law and I crossed to France that Monday evening. He stayed with me for the night at the Canadian Headquarters at Hesden. He told me to let Lloyd George know the upshot of the Sutton Courtney interview. I sent Lloyd George a telegram, vague in form but clear enough in meaning. It was intercepted for a time by the military censorship. This used to happen quite frequently, although I was at that time the representative of the Canadian Government. Messages to my own Canadian Prime Minister were sometimes intercepted. The desire was, I fear, only to show a little brief authority, for the telegrams were always despatched in the end.

It was clear that the decision to appoint Lloyd George to the War Office had been forced on

an unwilling Prime Minister by the joint action of the two strong men of the Government. This fact alone was sufficient to give cause for reflection; but there was another curious and ominous feature about the actual terms of the appointment. Lloyd George was, of course, fully conversant with the nature of the Kitchener-Robertson agreement, and he had very rightly and naturally declared to all his friends over and over again that he would not take office so long as that agreement subsisted unaltered. In fact, to do so was simply to court trouble. None the less, in the following week he *did* accept the seals on exactly the same terms as his predecessor, and so became ruler of only half the War Secretary's field. Apparently, an interview with Field-Marshal Robertson gave him a fallacious assurance that no friction was to be anticipated.

Two aspects of a single fact stood out in glaring light from this transaction: the Prime Minister had made a forced appointment, and he had done it in such a way that it was almost certain to bring the new Secretary of State into conflict with the soldiers, who wanted him there no more than did the Prime Minister. Here we have the situation which contained within it one of the potent causes of the downfall of the second Asquith Administration, of the disruption of the Liberal party, and, gathering a momentum of results in its course as a falling boulder sweeps down an avalanche, finally produced the second Coalition Ministry.

But if the Kitchener-Robertson agreement was one of the proximate causes of the final explosion,

far more significant to the seeing eye was Asquith's retreat from the position he had taken up. Previous distribution of offices had been to him either matters of his own choice or else more or less matters of indifference and of accommodating the desires of others. Now a possible rival had been imposed on him against his will.

Here was the situation. In the formation of the Coalition Ministry Asquith had deliberately depressed Bonar Law's position by giving all the important offices to Liberals. It was this act which set the warning death-knell of his administration ringing. I mean by this that if from the very start he had treated Bonar Law not as simply one of a group of Ministers, but as a partner and a co-equal, he could have prolonged the life of his Ministry almost indefinitely.

He had only to make Bonar Law Deputy Leader and the real manager of the affairs of the Government to secure a smooth passage for his administration and his own titular supremacy. For Bonar Law had no objection to working with Asquith. Bonar Law liked him and admired him ; it was the incompetency of his war administration to which the Conservative leader was opposed. And this defect could have been rectified by an administrator of the Bonar Law type in a position of authority.

Even after the original error made by Asquith in " the First Intrigue," there was still plenty of time for him to repair his mistake, because Bonar Law, though damaged, felt no resentment against

the Prime Minister. Asquith failed to take this chance. He dealt with Bonar Law as an ordinary subordinate colleague. Consequently, the original and essential instability of Asquith's administration remained.

In addition, the Ministry developed a secondary but very serious weakness in the growing intensity of the quarrel between Lloyd George and McKenna, which Asquith did nothing either to conciliate or to quell.

Lastly, and on this point I would lay the greatest emphasis, he was utterly defeated over the choice of a new War Secretary—and that by a combination of the powerful Tory chief, whom he would not take into partnership, and of the second greatest figure in his Ministry, whom he would neither conciliate nor dismiss. Such a formidable alliance showed that the end was in sight.

CHAPTER XVI

MR. ASQUITH

A PRIME Minister who has been beaten once may be beaten again, and more than one personality sat down to reflect on the possibilities opened up by the exhibition of weakness over the choice of a new Secretary of State for War.

And yet it may be said that in many ways Asquith's work had been well done and that the charm of his character did not court enmity. It is quite certain that mere jealousy had no part in his attempt to restrict the powers and activities of Lloyd George. His sense of his own superiority protected him from such a small yet poignant emotion. He was the greatest member of the House of Commons of our time, and Lord Balfour, despite Asquith's own generous compliment, must rely for his natural pre-eminence on other titles to fame than this. The reasons for his attitude of repression towards Lloyd George were almost certainly based on a quite different view. Since war broke out he had seen his second-in-command fight his way ruthlessly from office to office, and he had come to the conclusion that any favour conferred on him was merely a prelude to a

further demand; he was not alone in accepting the "selfish hypothesis" of Lloyd George's career.

Mr. Asquith is hard to describe, because within his own limited sphere, the management of Parliament in quiet times, he was perfection, and he was a failure because outside those limitations, and yet within his own range of time, lay a world of battle, murder, and sudden death—and that time called for men of a different range of genius. And more than most politicians of our period Asquith looked often to the past, always to the present, and seldom to the future. He was the last of the school of Gladstone, and with all their fundamental differences of temperament he possessed much in common with his old leader—so much that possibly only an old-time Liberal can really understand him.

Mr. Gladstone had so great a veneration for the Crown, while he constantly appealed to the people, that his attitude often gave offence to his more radical supporters. So Asquith, while he cared nothing for that society which is supposed, somewhat erroneously, to centre itself round the old landed aristocracy, considered himself the Prime Minister of the people, but the servant of the King, regarded the office of the Sovereign with veneration and received his personal attention with pleasure. Mr. Gladstone used to address crowds standing on the platform of a railway carriage. Mr. Asquith, though quite devoid of the ordinary intense desire of the politician for the limelight, had a similar pleasure in these

station demonstrations—these spontaneous by-products of party or national enthusiasm.

And yet he had in him an element of shyness which made him push through such a crowd with an almost glum appearance of displeasure. In the House of Commons he was much the same, though his apparent roughness was not misunderstood and never diminished his popularity with his own supporters. It is perhaps permissible to dwell on some of the idiosyncrasies of so well-known a figure instead of leaving them to be disinterred by the biographers of 1970.

From the public point of view Asquith's mentality was a curious one. He used his immense capacities for tearing the heart out of a mass of material in a few minutes to bolster up his intense intellectual laziness. Reading and assimilating with great rapidity, and gifted with the capacity for re-expressing the result in a lucid and ordered way, he gave to his speeches the very minimum of preparation. The danger of this method in war time was that the conclusion reached might be purely superficial. And there is no doubt that he was remiss in dictating or dealing with long official memoranda and documents. Yet, like the late Lord Salisbury, but in a busier age, he would write an infinite number of short letters in his own hand—so painstaking was he in one thing, so careless in the other. It is not suggested that Asquith did not know his war facts and did not form reasoned judgments upon them. He did so in the same way in which a lawyer reads and judges the facts of a brief.

It was indeed marvellous how he attained to the knowledge he displayed. He devoted so much of his time to conversation, companionship, and even to social pursuits that it would have appeared impossible that the remaining hours of the day could have been sufficient for him to get through the immense amount of work which fell to his share. Even allowing for his splendid memory, one can only suppose that the hours given to trivialities were not really wasted, but that his subconscious mind was all the time working and pondering over grave issues and presenting him at the end with a completed process of thought.

In private, he possessed the quite well recognised habit of repeating at intervals certain cycles of stories or remarks if a certain cue were given him. Thus, if a guest called attention to the portrait of Charles James Fox on the wall at Downing Street, it was quite well known that he would on every occasion make precisely the same remarks—and the test was frequently applied. So if he saw a familiar face, even after a lapse of four or five years, it would at once recall to his mind some old joke or episode connected with the man, and he would tell him this again at intervals whenever he met him. That this was no vagary of age is proved by the fact that he always possessed this trait—a pretty useful one for a politician. Making, as he did, almost a fetish of loyalty and friendship, he was much beloved in his own intimate circle and among a wide and varied entourage of friends.

Such was the dominant figure of the old school

—of whom, probably, no two men will ever agree as to how far his subtlety was a weakness or his strength a mere refusal to face facts.

The political developments of the war from the very outset presented him with two sets of difficulties he peculiarly disliked—disunion in the Cabinet and the necessity for parting with old friends. As an individual and a patriot, it was easy enough for him to stand up for the honour of England in August 1914; as the promoter of Liberal unity he was agonised to see the split in the Cabinet, and hated to receive the resignations of the pacifists. For he was loyal in supporting a colleague in trouble even beyond the limits of prudence—and this in spite of his habit of discussing the shortcomings of Ministers in a rather detached and superior way.

Again, the first Coalition Ministry was from the start a tangled mass of dissensions always liable at any minute to break into a flame. Its very birth necessitated the violent expulsion of several tried and trusted colleagues, always a painful business to Asquith. It must be said, however, that once he had made up his mind that a Minister must go he acted firmly and promptly. "Well," he would say, "the axe must fall." And when his Coalition Ministry was formed it was a case of guillotining Liberals in a batch. And as the severed heads rolled in the sawdust he had to embrace a new committee of alien Tory colleagues.

From the personal and social point of view Mr. Asquith knew nothing of the Tory party.

For Lord Balfour, indeed, as one of the last monoliths of his own epoch, he had the greatest veneration, and, as we have seen, called him early in the war into close consultation. But Tories as a class he regarded from the orthodox standpoint as either fools or knaves. Of Bonar Law he had at the outset a very poor opinion as an uncultured person who had reached prominence by an accident, and the Opposition Leader's display from 1911 onwards of an unexpected strength of wrist in Parliamentary dialectic was simply an annoying surprise.

In the Coalition Ministry of 1915-1916 he underestimated Bonar Law utterly, and indeed never appreciated him until he had lost him. Yet there was no temperamental reason why the two men should not have come together. They had in common a certain cautious way of looking at life. Bonar Law recognised this appeal in Asquith and was always ready to work with him. But his offers of loyalty met with no real kindred response from the Prime Minister, who, in spite of demonstration after demonstration of Bonar Law's commanding moral and political strength, could not realise either his wisdom or his power. It was only after Bonar Law's departure that Asquith applied to him the honourable and touching epithet " shrewd and gentle."

Unquestionably, this underestimate of Bonar Law's capacities at the beginning of their relations led Asquith to acquiesce far too readily in his exclusion from the Chancellorship of the Exchequer or the Ministry of Munitions on the

"His relations with Grey were of that distant but friendly kind which an ocean might have with a contiguous mountain peak."

THE RT. HON. H. H. ASQUITH AND THE RT. HON. SIR EDWARD GREY.

formation of the Coalition Government in May 1915, and if the main initiative in this act of exclusion came from Lloyd George, Asquith undoubtedly played second murderer. His mistake, handsomely repented afterwards, was that he thought Bonar Law's capacity and intellect had never soared above the Glasgow iron market. But the whole incident brought out a certain tendency to amiable and indecisive language which gave rise to misunderstanding. The Prime Minister succeeded in giving some of the Tories the idea that he favoured Bonar Law for the Ministry of Munitions and the Liberals the impression that he was supporting Lloyd George. There is not the slightest doubt that in reality he lent his weight to Lloyd George throughout, gave him Munitions, and promised to keep the Exchequer ready for him when he cared to return. In high politics misunderstandings about appointments are far more common than accusations of bad faith in matters of policy, and Asquith was not exempt from the common lot and subject to the trials which await Prime Ministers in such matters.

His own personal friends in the new Ministry were naturally of the Liberal persuasion : Crewe —whose judgment he with many wise men greatly esteemed in opposition to the popular verdict— Haldane, and Montagu, his one familiar of the younger generation. His relations with Grey were of that distant but friendly kind which an ocean might have with a contiguous mountain peak. Lord Reading, another friend, was apt only

to appear as a storm petrel, to prove that there was a divergence between Asquith and Lloyd George, and, changing rapidly into a dove, to bring the peace of healing.

In the course of Cabinet intercourse with Tories many of the old party prejudices melted away, and Asquith's conduct of affairs was undoubtedly regarded with approval by some of the stoutest upholders of the Tory tradition. But neither his ability nor their adherence could deflect the current of events. He supplied his own epitaph when he said, an hour before his defeat in East Fife was declared, "It is hard to win the confidence of the people—but, once won, you must be very unwise to lose it."

A new and harsher world produced situations which could not be met by mere evasion or delay, and which would not wait on the necessities of compromise. The master of the old school of fencing met the difficulties with all the accustomed weapons. But as the world surged more and more fiercely about him his strokes began to go wide. Parties and precedents vanished, and the Cabinet and the nation became divided between those who were anxious to win the war slowly and by rule and those who were determined to win it at any cost and to win it quickly, because delay spelt ruin. The new school of reality therefore gathered not out of political principles, but out of sheer preservative instinct, round the new man who strode on to a battlefield which suited his adaptive genius. Asquith fell because he was by nature a Conservative. But the beginning of his fall dates

from the struggle over the War Office, and when Lloyd George went to Whitehall as War Secretary the crisis of 1916 had in fact begun.

And here I must—for the present, at any rate—break off my narrative. All that happened to produce the change of Government in the autumn of that year I wrote down at the time in something approaching a diary form, and such a photographic picture of a great political crisis does not lend itself readily to publication.

APPENDIX

(*See page* 80)

February 7, 1915.

My dear Grey,

During my visit to Paris I had several opportunities of discussing with Ministers the question of the Balkans. When I first mentioned it to the Minister of Finance, I found that Millerand had never mentioned to his colleagues that the suggestion of an expeditionary force to Salonika had been made to him when he was in England. I found subsequently, in conversations with the Prime Minister, Delcassé, and with Briand, that they also had been kept in the dark as to the conversations which took place in England between Millerand and British Ministers. They were astonished and not a little annoyed that the matter had not been reported to them. I found that their attitude was much more friendly to the idea than was that of Millerand. Briand, who is much the ablest man in the Ministry, was strongly for it—in fact, he told me that he had been for some time urging some diversion of this kind upon General Joffre. I met Briand at Sir Francis Bertie's, and the three of us had a prolonged talk on the position. Briand told us that the Cabinet had considered the suggestion on Thursday; that Millerand stood absolutely alone in his opposition to it, Delcassé hesitating a little, not knowing what the attitude of Russia would be towards it; the rest of the Cabinet being perfectly unanimously in favour of the principle of an expeditionary force of two divisions being sent down to Salonika at the earliest practicable moment, preparations to be made at once, and the troops to be

sent as soon as Generals Joffre and French could be persuaded to spare them. They preferred an expeditionary force in which the French army should be represented. They therefore suggested that one British and one French division should be sent. The President of the Republic was present at the council; he also approved of this course.

It is now a question of persuading Joffre. Briand was of opinion, and so was the President, that if a joint Note was addressed to Rumania and Greece, asking them whether they would be prepared to declare war immediately if an expeditionary force of two divisions were sent to Salonika, and if they replied in the affirmative, then no doubt General Joffre would gladly spare the necessary force. Briand said it was too preposterous to imagine that if 40,000 men from the West brought in 800,000 from the East, thus withdrawing German pressure on the East, that any general could possibly object to such a plan.

Briand told Bertie and myself that he would propose at yesterday's meeting of the French Cabinet that a joint Note should be sent in these terms to Rumania and to Greece. Bark, the Russian Finance Minister, strongly supported the proposal, and thought Russia would gladly send a small force to occupy Serbian Macedonia, so as to make an attack by Bulgaria impossible. Izvolsky, whom Bark consulted on the subject, was also emphatically of the same opinion. The French are very anxious to be represented in the expeditionary force. Briand thinks it desirable from the point of view of a final settlement that France and England should establish a right to a voice in the settlement of the Balkans by having a force there. He does not want Russia to feel that she alone is the arbiter of the fate of the Balkan peoples.

I found the President and Briand and the Prime Minister very sceptical as to what Russia would or could do in the immediate future. They were very doubtful

as to whether Russia was in a position, owing to her lack of rifles and ammunition, to bring in anything like an overwhelming force on the eastern frontier for some months; in fact, they are very inclined to take our War Office view as to the effective numbers of the Russian troops in the coming spring and summer.

I have no idea what Delcassé's view is after yesterday's Cabinet Council, but I hope you will bear in mind in discussing the question with him that with the exception of Millerand he was the only man amongst the French Ministers who expressed any doubt at all as to the feasibility of this plan. Briand is in favour of an operation on a much larger scale, and he told me that he had had the idea examined by experts in the War Office and that they reported favourably on the proposal, provided troops could be spared by General Joffre and Lord Kitchener.

Bertie was present, and heard the whole of this conversation, and he may have reported to you its purport separately. When he and I first saw the President, he examined all the objections, but I could see that even then he was quite friendly to the idea, and at the Council on the following day, as I have already pointed out, he voted in favour of its adoption.

Yesterday I saw Sir John French and General Robertson, the new Chief of the Staff. Every soldier I have met since the beginning of the war has placed Robertson in the forefront as the most conspicuous success amongst our generals, and he made a deep impression on the Governor of the Bank,* Montagu,† and myself yesterday. He is a shrewd, clear-headed, strong man. No general except Kitchener made quite the same impression on my mind as Robertson did yesterday. French introduced the idea of an expedition, and at first he was hostile, not in principle, but on the ground that he could not spare the troops. However, he called Robertson in, and when I explained to him exactly what the proposal was, he had

*Lord Cunliffe.
†Rt. Hon. Edwin S. Montagu.

no hesitation in saying that it was " good strategy." He maintained that view throughout the discussion. This influenced French's attitude very considerably. I told him we were very anxious to carry his judgment along with ours in any scheme which affected the military operations for which he was responsible. Ultimately, he agreed that if the Rumanians and the Greeks promised to march on our undertaking to send an expeditionary force to Salonika, he would spare at least a division for that purpose. He is willing and, I think, anxious to come over to discuss the project with the War Council. He suggested that he should be invited, and I hope that the Prime Minister and Kitchener can see their way to asking him to attend an early meeting of the War Council.

Robertson would have gone further than French ; he would send not merely one but two divisions at once if Greece came in, and even on the off-chance of forcing a decision in the Balkans. He thinks it will compel Bulgaria to at least neutrality. If Briand is as successful in the mission which he promised to undertake to General Joffre, then there is no reason why the expeditionary force should not start within a week or ten days at the outside.

I am sure you will agree that there is every reason why the joint Note should be sent without delay. It is quite clear from the telegrams which have appeared in the sections during the last few days that anything in the nature of an arrangement between the Balkan States is impossible. I think the attitude of the Serbian Prime Minister, as revealed in our telegram from Nish, is unalterable. I doubt whether it would be possible for him to give up a substantial part of his territory in advance until he actually gets something in return. It would produce such a feeling of discouragement in his army as to paralyse their efforts. They have done so brilliantly that it would be a misfortune if this were to happen.

There are several ominous telegrams which indicate clearly that Bulgaria is hardening into opposition to the Triple Entente. There is the telegram about the success

of their borrowing mission to Berlin. The Germans are not such fools as to advance money without receiving some assurances as to Bulgaria's action in certain contingencies. There are the telegrams from Dedeagatch about the laying of mines. These mines can only be used against the Entente Powers. There are the rumours about bands being organised to attack the railway; and there are one or two others, all pointing in the same direction. Then the Rumanian news is for the moment discouraging —the trouble they have taken to explain away the loan raised in England, among other items of news. I am afraid that they have a better appreciation of the Russian position than we have, and that they are losing confidence in the Russian strength. Unless therefore we mean to allow the great possibilities of the Balkans to slip out of our hands, we ought not to dilly-dally any longer. If we fail to take timely action here our condemnation will be a terrible one. As I read the sections I feel that even days count now. My experience yesterday shows that the generals, if properly taken in hand, can be persuaded. No general likes to have his troops taken away to another sphere of action. His mind is naturally concentrated on the trenches in front of him, unless he is a very big man indeed, and a man, moreover, who has the responsibility not merely for the success of the operations under his immediate control; and neither Joffre nor French are quite in this position.

I should like to see you to-morrow to give you a fuller account of my interview, but I thought it well to send you a summarised report before you see Delcassé.

Yours sincerely,

(Sd.) D. Lloyd George.

The Rt. Hon. Sir Edward Grey, K.G., M.P.

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